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**PEARL BUCK'S CONCERN ABOUT UNIVERSAL  
THEMES UNDER THE CHINESE POINT OF VIEW IN  
*THE GOOD EARTH***

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## ERRATA

- Page 1: instead of "the Chinese have preoccupations common to" read "common"
- Page 4: "It to honor those who can write so convin/ingly" read "It is to honor those who can write so convinc/ingly"
- Page 5: "to what extent Miss Buck was learned" read "has"
- Page 10: "doubtless can we think of a deceitfull character" read "deceitful"
- Page 15: "In this point any difficulties immortality and respect almost fuse and enable the Chinese overcome" read "In this point immortality and respect almost fuse and enable the Chinese to overcome any difficulties."
- Page 18: "his esteem increazing" read "increasing"
- Page 25: "written down by storytellers and on mellfluous prose" read "mellifluous"
- Page 31: "Wang Lung's concerns is about how" read "concern"
- Page 34: "for the poor accustomed to bearing their own fate" read "for the poor are accustomed to"
- Page 42: "to preach from generation to in their poetry , " read "from generation to generation in"
- Page 45: "it is the Earth that achieves to calm his down" read "to calm him down"
- Page 57: "tell him money his concerned" read "money is"
- Page 96 : "because he merly takes another woman" read "merely"
- Page 115: "however it is also true that it is also true that close contact with Nature" read "however, it is also true that it is the close contact with Nature"

In memory of  
my mother.  
Through this work  
I gained better  
understanding about the  
Chinese character

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank both my dearest sister Sheila for her great cooperation and encouragement and my orientator, Friar Heriberto Arns, for his dedication and appraisal.

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## RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho é tentar mostrar como a autora Pearl S. Buck em sua obra *The Good Earth* trata de alguns conceitos e preocupações de ordem moral e social universais sob o enfoque dos chineses.

A autora é uma americana interpretando um universo um pouco diverso dos padrões do Ocidente; contudo valemo-nos da colaboração de um autor chinês Lin Yutang através de sua obra *My Country and My People* para constataremos quão verdadeiras as interpretações de Pearl Buck são.

Para estabelecermos um elo entre a personagem principal Wang Lung e seu contexto social foi necessário conhecermos a sociedade e os valores a que seus membros se apegam e, daí, inseri-lo neste contexto. Desta forma foi possível traçarmos paralelos e diferenciações entre a China e o Ocidente.

Embora Wang Lung percorra os ciclos da vida, biologicamente, com todos os seres humanos tais como: juventude, maturidade e velhice e tenha preocupações em termos

morais, sociais, temporais, espaciais e psicológicos de ordem universal, estes são peculiares a um chinês. Portanto são chineses o modo como ele apreende o mundo, suas preocupações de ordem moral e social tais como o respeito e estima pelos concidadãos, a "face" do chinês, o amor e sexo, e o casamento; preocupação de ordem espacial: a terra, o apego a ela e a ganância de maior aquisição, e mais importante: o que ela representa para si; preocupação de ordem temporal como a sobrevivência, imortalidade representada através dos filhos, o que a morte representa para um chinês; e, finalmente, preocupações de ordem psicológica tais como a felicidade e o constante anseio à paz na velhice.

Em *The Good Earth* Miss Buck cria uma personagem suscetível às falhas e realizações, e se desenvolve a tal ponto que Wang Lung se nos apresenta como verossímil e humano e não somente uma personagem de ficção.



## ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to make an attempt to demonstrate how Miss Pearl S. Buck, in her famous novel *The Good Earth*, manipulates some concepts and considerations, which can be considered universal, though under the Chinese viewpoint.

Wang Lung, the main character, is a Chinese due to his environment and some of the characteristics given to him by an American - Miss Pearl Buck; nevertheless, we needed the help of a Chinese author to learn why and to what extent Wang Lung is Chinese. Through Mr. Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* we perceive how different and how similar both civilizations - the Chinese and the Occidental are. This way we managed to establish a link between the main character and the society in which he lives. Moreover, we learn not only the bases of this society but also the true values to which the members of this particular community are attached.

Biologically Wang Lung lives and goes through the cycles of life like everybody, such as: youth, maturity,

and old age. In addition, he has his moral, social, temporal, spatial, and psychological preoccupations which are common to all human beings, though they are treated and regarded under the uniqueness of a Chinese. Therefore, it is typical of a Chinese the way the character sees the world, his social and moral considerations such as respect and esteem by the villagers, the Chinese "face", love and sex, and marriage; his "spacial" preoccupation, like the obstinacy and attachment to Earth and the consequent greed to acquire more land, and the most important point: what the Earth represents to himself; also his temporal concerns like survival, immortality through his offspring, and what Birth and Death stand for; and, finally, his psychological reflexions, such as happiness and the continual desire for peace in his old age.

In *The Good Earth* Miss Buck shows us a character susceptible to successes and failures, which will determine his fulfillment, and develops him to such an extent that Wang Lung is skillfully presented as a likely and credible man, and not only as a character of fiction.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

China may seem to be a somewhat exotic country where values and standards are rather different from those accepted and incorporated to the Western civilization. Our purpose is to demonstrate that Miss Pearl Buck has manipulated universal values through the Chinese viewpoint, in other words, the universal themes are presented under the Chinese focus.

Miss Pearl S. Buck knows China and her people very much, not only because she grew up and lived among the Chinese for many years but also because she has loved this people to the extent that she has learned their thoughts and concepts of the world. As a matter of fact she does not feel clashes between both civilizations at all, although they differ a great deal. This way she does not seem to make any attempt to differentiate China and the Occident, she rather approximates them and shows to the Westerners that China and the Chinese have preoccupations common to everybody, despite they feel and express themselves differently. Her characters seem to be only

incidentally Chinese, for they may be recognized as universal.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Buck's writings amount to more than eighty books in addition to articles and speeches, most of them dealing with the Chinese people and their beloved country-China. She has in fact chosen the Chinese peasants, for they represented about four-fifths of the entire population and who were somewhat the genuine representatives of the Chinese culture.<sup>2</sup>

We have chosen her most famous novel which tells about the Chinese countrymen - *The Good Earth* (first published in 1931) for two reasons. The first one is because this book seems to be her most complete report about the Chinese peasant and his way of living and thoughts. *The Good Earth* deals with the most important Chinese concerns such as Respect and Esteem, Filial Piety, "Face", what Earth represents to this people, Birth and Death, immortality through offsprings, Happiness and Fulfillment, and Peace. As we can see most of them are in fact universal concerns. The second reason is because Miss Buck had her recognition both as a writer and as an interpreter of a world which the Westerners did not know fairly well. Due to international conjecture and the installment of communism in China, which was a social and political manifestation contrary to the Occidental standards, any subjects dealing with this country had lost interest and therefore repudiated. Nowadays because

of the new international political attempt to approximate China and the West, there arises a new appeal to learn about the Chinese culture. Furthermore there are new sources, means, and interchange of both information and cultures.

*The Good Earth* was first published in 1931, at the time that the Occident - the United States and the European countries still had present in their minds the consequences of the Great Depression. The learning of the bitterness of a very poor plougher's life and eventually his ascension, despite his position in this society and the natural calamities, made the readers identify themselves with the main character and be more hopeful for the future. Miss Buck was then widely read and her novels soon became best-sellers. However, it is not fair to consider this the only reason for her acceptance among the public, for her skill in writing about China bestowed her literary awards.

In 1931 Miss Buck was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her skillfulness in writing *The Good Earth* both for her style and the portrayal of the Chinese peasant so well. As a matter of fact this novel was the first of a trilogy named *House of Earth*. The others are *Sons* (1932) and *A house divided* (1935). They describe the ascension and the decline of a peasant family. In November, 1935, she was awarded the Howells Medal, bestowed to the American authors who had distinguished with their work

during the period of five years. This award was conferred by a Committee consisted of some members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She was given the award with enthusiastic words:

*It is to honor those who can write so convincingly of people, whether in tragedy or comedy of human life, that the puppets cease to be puppets, and live and move and have their being, that this memorial to William Dean Howells was endowed. Because she has done this so unerringly and with such an artistic sense of values. I am commissioned to bestow upon the author of The Good Earth this medal of gold for the five year period just ended.*<sup>3</sup>

Her literary recognition culminates when she was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1938, for both her novels about China, especially *The Good Earth*, and her biographical masterpieces about her mother *The Exile* and about her father *Fighting Angel*. About *The Good Earth* the master of ceremonies in Stockholm said: that Miss Buck has become widely known through her Chinese peasant epic *The Good Earth*. She has presented a hero who was taught to live as his ancestors had lived, and whose virtues came from his attachment to the Earth that gives good crops in return to the main character's care for it.<sup>4</sup>

To learn about China through Miss Buck's account did not seem to be fairly enough. To supply it we have made use of the aid of a Chinese author. *My Country and My People* written by Mr. Lin Yutang suited our necessity,

for this work is very helpful to clarify some of the Chinese concepts found in *The Good Earth*. It is written by a Chinese who is very well acquainted with his people and who gives us a vivid and understandable picture of the Chinese values and society. In this way it was possible to establish to what extent Miss Buck has learned China and her countrymen. Mr. Lin Yutang, fortunately, does not try to deceit the Westerns about <sup>the</sup> Chinese "faults" but presents them as a matter of fact as possible. In the end we learn that the Chinese are not better nor worse than the Occidentals. They only have a different vision of the cosmos, which means that they have their peculiarities and they may give importance to some values that are not meaningful to a Western, or the other way around.

We have established three chapters to explain what the Chinese world is like as well as how Miss Buck has interpreted it. The first chapter sets a social and cultural background to delineate the Chinese society which, basically, consists of the familiar organization. The basis of the notion of society is the family, a greater grouping of families sharing the same ideal in a larger area form the villages and, finally, the sum of villages and cities make up this country. Thus, there is a spatial notion rather than political. Inside the familiar organization there are rules that are strictly followed as the "filial piety" which consists of the respect and hierarchical priviledges that the young should consider and honour. This honour extends to a

kind of worship to the dead and ancestors. Among the villagers there is a preoccupation of being esteemed and respected by the members of this community. In addition, there is a special concept that is not found in the West and which is said to be a man's "face" - a mixture of respect, consideration, and a right acquired by anybody for which every Chinese fights in order not to lose it.<sup>5</sup>

In the second chapter we learn the reason for the Chinese's attachment to Earth. They praise the elements and the harmony present in Nature. Therefore Earth and the harmonious seasonal cycles influence their way of living. The possession of land and the care for it represent their roots and the meaning of life to them. Happiness is in a way in accordance with the understanding of Life; in a broader sense we can say that Earth may bring happiness and fulfillment depending on the heed and treatment one gives to it. There is another important point to study in this chapter which concerns the way a Chinese faces Death. There are not any hints of fear or agonies before the Death, for it is accepted as a natural consequence of lifetime - Death is in a way just another step to reunite Man to Earth.<sup>6</sup>

The third chapter deals with the relationship of a man and a woman and the Chinese concept of marriage. We also try to give a general view of the characterization of both characters - the farmer and his wife and some of his psychological concerns like "Peace", and how the



Chinese apprehend it.<sup>7</sup>

We conclude with a verification of how and how far Miss Buck has treated universal themes under the Chinese point of view and how much she has understood China and the Chinese.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>THOMPSON, Dody Weston. Pearl Buck. In: FRENCH, Warren G., KIDD, Walter, org. A Literatura americana e o prêmio Nobel. São Paulo, Cultrix, 1971. 209p. p.86.

Movendo-se num mundo vivido de costumes chineses, numa paisagem espiritual vista sempre compreensivelmente através de olhos chineses, os personagens principais de Pearl Buck dessa época eram, não obstante, tão "universais", tão reconhecíveis em toda parte, de modo a parecer somente incidentalmente chineses. Não se obtém nesses romances nenhuma sensação real do gênio de um povo que era, na realidade, profundamente diferente dos do Ocidente. Em parte alguma, por exemplo, nos é mostrado o que constitui um taoísta, um budista ou um confucionista, suas diferenças e similaridades, ou a considerável distância que os separa do pensamento europeu (conquanto alguns aspectos difusos de suas filosofias afetassem seus escritos). Pearl Buck não estava interessada em ressaltar diferenças. Levada por viva convicção, pretendia ela, inconscientemente, nesses primeiros livros talvez, demonstrar semelhanças, a fim de promover compreensão, permitindo que o Ocidente desfizesse o hiato -- ou, então, mostrar que não havia, absolutamente, hiato humano algum, salvo uma brecha cultural fictícia.

<sup>2</sup>DOYLE, Paul A. "The Good Earth". In: \_\_\_\_\_. Pearl S. Buck. New York, Twayne, 1965. 175p. p.36.

<sup>3</sup>"A Biographical Sketch of Pearl S. Buck". New York, John Day, 1936. 28p. p.20.

<sup>4</sup>COLEÇÃO DOS PRÊMIOS NOBEL DE LITERATURA PATROCINADA PELA ACADEMIA SUECA E PELA FUNDAÇÃO NOBEL PRÊMIO 1938. Pearl Buck. Rio de Janeiro, Delta, 1966. 315p. p.18.

Com pura objetividade, insuflou vida aos seus conhecimentos e nos deu a epopéia rural que a tornou mundialmente cé-

lebre: A Boa Terra. Tomou como herói um homem cuja existência foi a mesma que levaram os seus antepassados durante numerosos séculos e com alma tão primitiva quanto a dele. As suas virtudes emanam da mesma fonte: a afinidade com a terra que oferece as suas colheitas, se o homem der o seu trabalho.

<sup>5</sup>LIN YUTANG. "Social and Political Life". In: \_\_\_\_\_. My Country and My People. New York, John Day, 1936. 382p. p.172 205.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., "Ideals of Life". p.100-32.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., "The Art of Living" p.322-44.

## 2. CHINESE SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The question may arise about to what extent Wang Lung is a Chinese character. Of course it is not only because his name sounds Chinese or because the events take place in China. Miss Buck sets him in such a context that doubtless can we think of a deceitfull character inserted in a Chinese background. As a matter of fact, no Western writer knew so much about China as Miss Buck. Besides having lived among the Chinese she shared their fears and anxieties to the point that she was able to express in words what these feeling were like.

Much has been said about Chinese social organization and how it has been kept unchanged throughout centuries, it has even been kept its feudal "outline", which is quite unacceptable nowadays. But it is not the social organization, that we have learned about groups sharing the same ideals, fighting for more justice and equality, being ruled by common law, that has kept China as a great nation, What lies behind is its familiar organization explained by Mr. Lin Yutang in the chapter on "Social and Political Life" in his book My

*Country and My People:*

*The Chinese are a nation of individualists. They are family-minded, not social-minded, and the family is only a form of magnified selfishness. It is curious that the word "society" does not exist as an idea in Chinese thought. In the Confucian social and political philosophy we see a direct transition from family, CHIA, to the state, KUO, as successive stages of human organization, as in such sayings as "When the family is orderly, then the state is peaceful", or "Put the family in order and rule the state in peace. "The nearest equivalent to the notion of society is then a compound of the two words, KUOCHIA, or "State-family", in accordance with the rule for forming Chinese abstract terms."*<sup>11</sup>

It is true that the Chinese are individualistic and grasp the notion of family very tightly - we just need to think of the way they form their names: the family name comes first as if to tell everybody which family a person comes from. In this way the family name has priority against a person's name.

Sometimes, a Chinese family consists of the members of four generations living together under the same roof, and the eldest at command. He is always respected and heard because he is held as a wise man due to his age and life experience. This hierarchy is thoroughly accepted which lets the old generation be served before. Wang Lung is on the verge of starving when the first drought happens after his wedding. There is a great famine around but

*As for the old man, he fared better than any, for if there was anything to eat he was given it, even though the children were without. Wang Lung said to himself proudly that none should say in the hour of death he had forgotten his father. Even if his own flesh went to feed him the old man should eat.<sup>2</sup>*

He and his children may starve but not the eldest. Not only should the old be served before but the young should not show contempt or anger towards the older. The young also have duties to the old in the familiar organization. In The Good Earth, O-Lan, Wang Lung's wife expresses this filial duty in one of her rare speeches, a little while before she dies on her eldest son's wedding day:

*"Now I am content and this thing in me may do as it will. My son look to your father and your grand-father, and my daughter, look to your husband and your husband's father and his grandfather and the poor fool in the court. And you have no duty to any others."<sup>3</sup>*

Wang Lung does not show reluctance in pleasing his idle uncle and his family, although he does not feel like doing it. He much prefers to offend and to shout at them but he has duties to the older, Wang is very upset due to his uncle's and cousin's behaviour but he seems to try to console himself that one day there will be an end to it. The time that Wang has already become a prosperous and wealthy farmer, his sons wish to live in the big house—The House of Hwang, but he does not want to accompany them

at once.

*There was left in the house, then, none but the uncle and his wife and son and Ching and the laboring men, besides Wang Lung and his youngest son and the fool. And the uncle and his wife and son moved into the inner courts where Lotus had been and they took it for their own, but this did not grieve Wang Lung unduly, for he saw clearly there were not many days of life left for his uncle and when the idle old man was dead Wang Lung's duty to that generation was over and if the younger man did not do as he was told none would blame Wang Lung if he cast him out."*

Wang Lung is aware of his uncle's idleness and bad character but even so he does not dare to be against him. He has to show respect and contentedness whenever one meets the other and Wang tries to show his pleasure by having the old's company as a welcome guest.

According to Lin Yutang, an old man in China is regarded as a noble person, much nobler than a Western would consider him to be. As a matter of fact the Westerns tend to put the old aside or blame them when they need to support those who had done a great deal to bring their children up. This, fortunately, does not happen in any Chinese family as well as a well-bred man would never dare insult any old man. In fact, nowhere could an old man feel more at ease than in China, for he will never be considered dispensable, sometimes even worth being discharged as some Westerns think so, but as a living member of his small community and most of the times its

leader.<sup>5</sup>

The familiar principle:

*teaches our children the first lesson in social obligations between man and man, the necessity of mutual adjustment, self-control, courtesy, a sense of duty, which is very well defined, a sense of obligation and gratitude toward parents, and respect for elders.*<sup>6</sup>

This kind of hierarchy is also true within the same generation, which means, the eldest of a generation has certain privileges that the others do not have. He is going to be in charge of the whole family when the members of the older generation have gone or are not able to be ahead. At this point he takes advantage of his position before the younger, who now owe him respect and duty. For instance Wang Lung has three sons. The eldest is respected by both the second and the third brother, and the second should be paid respect by the youngest.

Since we have already learned some principles in the familiar organization it is important to mention that the root of the Chinese society is based on the familiar principles, as well as some social characteristics are derived from them. Society is thus an extension of the family. It seems to be difficult for a Westerner to understand how the Chinese have endured wars and rebellions, calamities, tyrannies, and its poverty for centuries without having ruined itself as



a country. The answer lies in the deep notion of how important the familiar organization is. All the external changes do not seem to have any greater effect on the individuals, for they keep on living without complaints. A Chinese simply accepts what comes to him since nothing has happened to the basis of his family, the organization of which:

*...very nearly takes the place of religion by giving man a sense of social survival and family continuity, thus satisfying man's craving for immortality, and through the ancestral worship it makes the sense of immortality very vivid. It breeds a sense of family honor, for which it is so easy to find parallels in the West.<sup>7</sup>*

The external does not partake of his immediate need of survival. He is conscious of his continuation through his offsprings, for the same way that he preserves his ancestors by worshipping their memories and respecting the old, his descendants will do the same for him. In this point ~~immortality~~ immortality and respect almost fuse and enable the Chinese to overcome any difficulties

*...the Chinese family system, which was so well-defined and organized as to make it impossible for a man to forget where his lineage belonged. This form of social immortality, which the Chinese prize above all earthly possessions, has something of the character of a religion, which is enhanced by the ritual of ancestor worship, and the consciousness of it penetrated deep into the Chinese soul.<sup>8</sup>*

This is so true that the important families keep in their houses tablets of ancestors in order to worship the dead. Wang Lung had it first asked when his first grandson was born, now that he is important

*And when the birth feast was over Wang Lung's son came to his father and he said, "Now that there are the three generations in this house, we should have the tablets of ancestors that great families have, and we should set the tablets up to be worshipped at the feast days for we are an established family now."*

*This pleased Wang Lung greatly, and so he ordered it and so it was carried out, and there in the great hall the row of tablets was set up, his grandfather's name on one and then his father's, and the spaces left empty for Wang Lung's name and his son's when they should die. And Wang Lung's son bought an incense urn and set it before the tablets.<sup>9</sup>*

Not only does the familiar organization help keep the social stability in China, but also the non-strict set division of the social classes. Although the Chinese divide their society in four classes: the cultivated, the farmers, the artisans, and the tradesmen there is no clash between them. We could think of antagonisms among themselves, which, in fact, there is none; each class respects the others due to their awareness of each one's importance. Lin Yutang tells us that

*The farmers, the artisans, and the merchants, being all part of the sap of the earth, are humble, quiet, self-respecting citizens. The farmers are placed, by Confucian theory, at the head of these three classes for the rice-*

*conscious Chinese always know where every grain comes from, and they are grateful. They, together with the merchants and artisans, all look up to the scholars as a class entitled to privilege and extra courtesy, and with the difficulty of acquiring a knowledge of the Chinese written characters, this respect comes from the bottom of their hearts.*<sup>10</sup>

Each one is, therefore, conscious of his position; we may think that there should be any kind of resentment, for some work hard and others have privileges. Let us, then, borrow some words from Lin Yutang which describe better their submission.

*It seems clear, then, that actually there are only two social classes in China, the yamen class who enjoyed extraterritorial rights without jurisdiction long before the Europeans came to China, and the non-yamen class who pay the taxes and obey the law. To put it a little more cruelly, there are only two classes in China, the top-dog and the underdog, who take turns. With their cheerful fatalism, the Chinese bear this scheme of things quite nobly and well. There are no established social classes in China, but only different families, which go up and down according to the vicissitudes of fortune.*<sup>11</sup>

We have, therefore, the second ground that determines the social stability in the Chinese society - both the flexibility of its social classes and the possibility of going upwards have made the poor endure a great number of counterpoints, either being natural or social misfortunes like calamities and the continuous internal rebellions and

wars.

These two elements - the familiar organization and the social flexibility have kept China as a whole; although there is a great number of differences in both the spoken language and the way people behave they remain basically as a unity because the root of their principles is the same.

It seems to be relevant to have a bracket at this point to explain how important the village system is to a Chinese.

*From the love of the family there grew a love for the clan, and from the love for the clan there developed an attachment for the land where one was born. Thus a sentiment arouse which may be called provincialism, in Chinese called t'UNGHSIANG KUANNIEN, or 'the idea of being from the same native place.' This provincialism binds the people of the same village, or the same district, or the same province together, and is responsible for the existence of district schools, public grainage, merchant guilds, orphanages, and other public foundations. Fundamentally, they spring from the family psychology and do not depart from the family pattern. It is the family mind enlarged so as to make some measure of civic cooperation possible.<sup>12</sup>*

To a Chinese to be well-esteemed by his village fellows is very meaningful, for the village is understood to be an extension of the family. A Chinese acquires importance in his village due to either his riches or his wisdom, and this notority may be accompanied by the esteem of the villagers. Wang Lung becomes aware of his esteem increasing

importance while his riches grows and, when he learns that his esteem and conceit among the villagers are sound, he gets very proud and satisfied.

*The men of the village, therefore, looked upon Wang Lung with increasing respect and they talked to him no more as to one of themselves but as to one who lived in a great house, and they came to borrow money of him at interest and to ask his advice concerning the marriage of their sons and daughters, and if any ~~two~~ had a dispute ~~for~~ over the boundary of a field, Wang Lung was asked to settle the dispute and his decision was accepted, whatever it was.*<sup>13</sup>

When the Wang family moves to the Great House that once belonged to the Hwangs, people in the town begin to talk about the repairs that have been taken within the courts of that house. Wang Lung's name thus reaches importance not only within the village but extends to the town.

*Then people on the streets of the town heard of all that Wang Lung's eldest son did, and they talked of what was being done in the great house, now that a rich man lived there again. And people who had said Wang The Farmer now said Wang The Big Man or Wang The Rich Man.*<sup>14</sup>

What we really learn in the end is that the family seems to be always behind the Chinese concept of society and that the village system may be understood as an extension of the family.

Wang Lung is a very poor farmer in the beginning of the novel. He does not even have good leaves for his

own and his father's morning tea. However he is a lucky man because fortune has turned to him and, incidentally, he takes part of one of the infinite assaults to rich men's houses. He had his chance at the time he went to the south due to a famine that took place where he lived in the North. Now he faces an opportunity to get some money and jewels which enable him to start a new life; and which becomes better continuously as far as he is considered as an important man, even the one who can help the other poor farmers solve their minor and legal matters. He reaches a position which he obtains respect from both his family and his country fellows due to his present monetary stability. It is interesting that no one has asked him how and where he has managed to get sources to prosper. Of course we cannot forget how diligent Wang Lung and his wife, O-Lan, are.

The matter of "respect" seems to concern both the Western and the Eastern civilization, for it is a goal of one's self-realization. However, in Chinese ideology "respect" does not only mean "honor" but also what they call "face", which does not only concern honor. It is a position that a respectful man acquires due to his ability in dealing with ordinary and unusual matters. It is not only pursued by the rich but by everyone. For instance, Wang Lung has spoken about a daughter of his uncle's behaviour to his uncle's wife:

"Nevertheless", he said. "although it is not for me to presume to advise the brother of my father, I will say this: it is better that a girl be married away while she is yet a virgin, and whoever heard of a bitch dog who was allowed on the streets who did not give birth to a litter?".<sup>15</sup>

Next day Wang Lung's uncle comes to his house and both discuss. At last

The blood flew into his uncle's yellow face and he rushed at his nephew and slapped him vigorously on both cheeks. "Now that", he cried, "for speaking so to your father's generation! Have you no religion, no morals, that you are so lacking in filial conduct?

Have you not heard it said that in the Sacred Edicts it is commanded that a man is never to correct an elder?"

Wang Lung stood sullen and immovable, conscious of his fault but angry to the bottom of his heart against this man who was his uncle.

"I will tell your words to the whole village!" screamed his uncle in a high cracked voice of fury. "Yesterday you attack my house and call aloud in the streets that my daughter is not a virgin; today reproach me, who if your father passes on, must be as your own father to you! Now may my daughters all not be virgins, but not from one of them would I hear such talk!" And he repeated over and over, "I will tell it to the village. I will tell it to the village..." until at last Wang Lung said unwillingly, "What do you want me to do?"

It touched his pride that this matter might indeed be called out before the village. After all, it was his own flesh and blood.<sup>16</sup>

Both do not refer to honor but think of their "face", the older because he is not offended with the naughty words spoken by Wang Lung and he is more interested in getting some

money from the latter, and Wang Lung who esteems his conceit of obeying the filial duty before the village. In order to keep his "face" before his country fellows he is obliged to let go some of his silvers which he obtained through hard work. May Lin Yutang explain the conceit of "face"

*Face cannot be translated or defined. It is like honor and is not honor. It cannot be purchased with money and gives a man or a woman a material pride. It is hollow and is what men fight for and what many women die for. It is invisible and yet by definition exists by being shown to the public. It exists in the ether and yet can be heard, and sounds eminently respectable and solid. It is amenable, not to reason but to social convention. It protects lawsuits, breaks up family fortunes, causes murders and suicides, and yet it often makes a man out of a renegade who has been insulted by his fellow townsmen, and it is prized above all earthly possessions. It is more powerful than fate and favor, and more respected than the constitution. It often decides a military victory or defeat, and can demolish a whole government ministry. It is that hollow thing which men in China live by.*<sup>17</sup>

This way we learn that the Chinese "face" is quite "untranslatable" into any other languages, because it is so unique to this people that only those who live in this environment or have experienced it in their lives are able to grasp it. Mr. Lin Yutang also says that: "not to give a man face is the utmost height of rudeness and is like throwing down a gauntlet to him in the West."<sup>18</sup> Therefore if we think, of Wang Lung and his belief in the "filial piety" which rules the family principle it is



easy to understand why Wang Lung is not likely to allow his uncle to lose his face. On the other hand Wang Lung cannot let his own face be lost both in case he disapproves his uncle openly before the village and eventually reminding the villagers of his disrespect to such a milenar principle. It is such a face

*...that is psychological and not physiological. Interesting as the Chinese physiological face is, the psychological face makes a still more fascinating study. It is not a face that can be washed or shaved, but a face that can be "granted" and "lost", and "fought for" and "presented as a gift". Here we arrive at the most curious point of Chinese social psychology. Abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated.<sup>19</sup>*

A very important point is that this face can be "conquered" by anybody either a man or a woman and, independently, of any social condition. Mr. Lin Yutang gives us an example which explain better, and says that "men and women are willing to drudge all summer in order to keep going a funeral celebration appropriate to the standing or face of the family, and old families on the decline are willing to go bankrupt and live in debt for life for the same reason."<sup>20</sup>

"Face" is thus a conceit inherent to the Chinese people who cherish it, Wang Lung praises it a great deal. Honor, "face", his esteem before the village, and his social status increase just as time goes by.

Miss Buck develops the plot very slowly, which means that the story goes on without sudden breaks and, though there are climaxes in the story we cannot say that they are attained abruptly. The events take place at a slow pace, we learn them as if they were happening without tension at all; they flow as a matter of fact as possible. This technique seems to match the way this people lives, in a country where time does not have such importance as in the Western countries. It has also been said that time in China is measured in centuries and not in minutes or hours as it is in the West.

Miss Buck has lived among the Chinese peasants at the time her parents were living in China due to her father's missionary work. and, later, with her husband. From that time she learned to love these simple people and, of course, she has taken their lives to develop her stories, like in *The Good Earth*.

Her style is very much influenced by the Chinese way of writing: simple, concrete, short sentences, sometimes long sentences linked only with the connective "and". She does not tell the events forwards and backwards but the story follows a chronological sequence. In *The Good Earth* Wang Lung starts the story on his wedding day; there is no allusion to his past life, but from this moment on he develops and is told, and becomes more vivid as he grows older. About her style Paul A. Doyle says that

*The style of The Good Earth is one of the most impressive characteristics. This style is based on the manner of the old Chinese narrative sagas related and written down by storytellers and on mellifluous prose of the King James version of the Bible. At certain times Miss Buck declared that her style was Chinese rather than biblical. She explained that she learned to speak Chinese and used Chinese idioms. Therefore, when she wrote about Chinese subject matter, the narrative formed itself mentally into Chinese language, and then she translated this material into English. She asserted that her prose was based on idiomatic Chinese and that she was often uncertain about the English qualities of her style.<sup>21</sup>*

Thus, she is influenced by both because it is said that she learned to speak Chinese before English and she was read aloud the Bible at home. Moreover, she was very interested in listening to stories narrated by her Chinese nanny - and old woman who used to help her mother at household duties. Miss Buck listened to the stories attentively and, therefore, has transmitted it through her writings.

It is true that when we read *The Good Earth* we do have the impression of a person telling us a story, though Wang Lung's finest characterization surpasses his narrator sometimes. He acquires such an independence that his character develops by himself and gains an autonomy that we recognize him as a true and a believable character not only as one of fiction. He becomes real to such an extent that we do not doubt such a man exists. He is Chinese doubtless, though a Chinese that does not only

belong to his country, for he embodies many characteristics common to the human-beings.

The simplicity and clarity of Miss Buck's sentences fit perfectly, for Wang Lung is a simple peasant and a "clear" man who does not conceal his faults. He is subjected to all human failures and is also moved with the beautiful and touchy moments in life. He starts as a simple peasant and ends as one and no matter how rich and respectful he becomes, he keeps his innocence and ideals to the end. It is important to point out that Miss Buck does not tell us all these details but she lets her characters speak, or rather feel their emotions and convey them by their best way.

We learn that Wang Lung belongs to the north, the population of which consists mostly of farmers and who are a great deal attached to their land and their customs; time in the novel is not clearly set but we learn some historic events and natural calamities that have been taken place throughout the narration. Once again Miss Buck's style succeeds in portraying a Chinese character, for time does not concern him, the same way as time does not seem to be relevant for the flowing of the plot. She may not have done it on purpose though it fits the subject matter as it was said before.

There is a break in Wang Lung's ordinary life when a drought, which happens at times, assaults where he lives. They are obliged to find another place to live in

order to survive, for the continuous sunny days do not let the farmers plant and harvest anything. The seeds do not grow for lack of water; consequently people start starving for lack of food. Most of them flee to the south in search of food and work. It is always interesting to notice the silent figure of O-Lan, Wang's wife, behind her husband. She is the one who carries out the burden of a firm character and who helps her husband the best way she can. She bears children and keeps on working in order to increase their productivity, and save some more silvers to buy land.

*From his fields Wang Lung reaped scanty harvest of hardy beans, and from his corn fields, which he had planted in despair when the rice beds had yellowed and died before ever the plants had been set into the watered fields, he plucked short stubby ears with the grains scattered here and there. There was not a bean lost in the threshing. He set the two little boys to sifting the dust of the threshing floor between their fingers after he and the woman had flailed the bean vines, and he shelled the corn upon the floor in the middle room, watching sharply every grain that flew wide. When he would have put the cobs away for fuel, his wife spoke out,*

*"No - do not waste them in burning. I remember when I was a child in Shantung when years like this came, even the cobs we ground and ate. It is better than grass." <sup>22</sup>*

Wang Lung and O-Lan take advantage and spare nothing to feed themselves and their family. It is interesting the way Miss Buck introduces the hard time this family has to undergo. Since the Chinese believe in fate and are in a

way superstitious, the author introduces their third newly-born child as an omen for a turn in their lives. This child happens to be a girl, who in Chinese tradition is not well-regarded, for girls are not worth being concerned; they are generally called "slave" or "maid". There are lots of references to this concept of women in *The Good Earth*. The moment of expectancy about the coming child is nicely described:

...He went into the room where he had slept with his wife and the last child. It was very dark, coming in as he did from the outer sunshine, and except for the bar of light from the hole, he could see nothing. But the smell of warm blood which he remembered so well filled his nostrils and he called out sharply,  
 "What now - has your time come?"  
 The voice of his wife answered from the bed more feebly than he had ever heard her speak,  
 "It is over once more. It is only a slave this time - not worth mentioning."  
 Wang Lung stood still. A sense of evil struck him. A girl!<sup>23</sup>

Wang Lung's girl's birth coincides with the quarrel he has just had with this uncle about the latter's daughter. Wang is upset with both events and goes back to his work very depressed. Miss Buck reinforces the picture of a hard time coming

He stood leaning upon his hoe and he was seized with sadness. It would be another harvest before he could buy that land now, a piece adjoining the one he had, and there was this new mouth in the house. Across

*the pale, pearl-colored sky of twilight a flock of crows flew, sharply black, and whirred over him, cawing loudly. He watched them disappear like a cloud into the trees about his house, and he ran at them, shouting and shaking his hoe. They rose again slowly, circling and re-circling over his head, mocking him with their cries, and they flew at last into the darkening sky. He groaned aloud. It was an evil omen.<sup>24</sup>*

This chapter finishes in such a way that conveys us a kind of suspense together with a kind of certainty of hard times. Wang's "slave's" birth together with the blackness and the mocking flight of the crows represent evil. Miss Buck ends with a short and slow sentence: "It was an evil omen.", contrasting with Wang's despair in trying to scatter the flock of crows. It is an intense passage, full of movements conveyed by both what is going on and the sound produced by the set of sibilant and palatal sounds. However the last sentences break this mood: "He groaned aloud. It was an evil omen." The feeling is no longer of despair but of rendering to something beyond Wang's control. The following chapter starts with the description of what next days are like with the sun shining without any rains. The evil is taking place

*It seemed as though once the gods turn against a man they will not consider him again. The rains, which should have come in early summer, withheld themselves, and day after day the skies shone with fresh and careless brilliance. The parched and starving earth was nothing to them. From dawn to dawn there was not a cloud, and at night*

*the stars hung out of the sky, golden and cruel in their beauty. The fields, although Wang Lung cultivated them desperately, dried and cracked, and the young wheat stalks, which had sprung up courageously with the coming of spring and had prepared their heads for the grain, when they found nothing coming from the soil or the sky for them, ceased their growing and stood motionless at first under the sun and at last dwindled and yellowed into a barren harvest. The young rice beds which Wang Lung sowed at first were squares of jade upon the brown earth. He carried water to them day upon day after he had given up the wheat, the heavy wooden buckets slung upon a bamboo pole across his shoulders. But though a furrow grew upon his flesh and a callus formed there as large as a bowl, no rain came.<sup>25</sup>*

There comes times of famine due to the drought. People have become thinner and thinner each day, up to the day they decide to go south to better their luck. It is no use keeping on working on such an earth through which nothing springs. They do not move at once but wait until there is no hope. As it was mentioned before, the changes do not happen abruptly; the writer delays their leaving as if to help build their non-hurry, on their non-worry about what concerns time. Their trip to the south is by train; through this passage we learn that the story takes place at the time that trains already existed in China, which the population called "firewagons". It is interesting how happy these ordinary men are, just to know what they need for their survival they do not desire to learn more than what is required for their living. Wang Lung has heard of trains but has never been



curious to have a close look at them. When somebody tells him about the existence of such vehicles Wang Lung simply reacts this way

*Firewagons! One had heard of them. Wang Lung in days past in the tea shop had heard men tell of these wagons, chained one to the other and drawn neither by men or beast, but by a machine breathing forth fire and water like a dragon. He had said to himself many times then that on a holiday he would go and see it, but with one thing and another in the fields there was never time, he being well to the north of the city. Then there was always distrust of that which one did not know and understand. It is not well for a man to know more than is necessary for his daily living.<sup>26</sup>*

The dream of improving their lives does not happen in the south either; Wang Lung's family undergoes hard times as well, though they are not haunted by fear of starving, for there is a kind of welfare institution which provides the poor some food for very little money. The money that Wang Lung still had is spent on buying their tickets and some mats to build a hut for them to shelter and to pay for their rice. Wang Lung's concern is about how he is going to support his family; he is used to working and the thought of begging as somebody suggests is against his principle

*Wang Lung withdrew a little from the others and turned himself about to the wall and secretly with his hand in his girdle he counted out the pence he had left. There was enough for the six mats and enough for each*

for a penny for rice and beyond that he had three pence left. It came over him with comfort that thus they could begin the new life. But the notion of holding up a bowl and begging of anyone who passed continued to distress him. It was very well for the old man and for the children and even for the woman, but he had his two hands.

"Is there no work for a man's hand?" he asked of the man suddenly, turning about.

"Aye, work!" said the man with contempt, and he spat upon the floor. "You can pull a rich man in a yellow riksha if you like, and sweat your blood out with heat as you run and have you sweat freeze into a coat of ice on you when you stand waiting to be called. Give me begging!" And he cursed a round curse, so that Wang Lung would not ask anything of him further.<sup>27</sup>

Of course Wang prefers to work hard with a riksha instead of begging, for this stands against his self-pride. We can notice that Wang Lung has never complained about working, no matter how hard or where it comes out to be.

From the chapter that deals with their first days and impressions of the city we learn where Wang Lung comes from, and the great contrast of his peaceful life in the north with the hectic life of the south, which is colourful, busy, plenty of food and full of people - both foreigners and Chinese. Even so Wang Lung does not forget his land and misses it a great deal; he becomes content just to think of his piece of land waiting for his coming back. Although the southern city where they have settled down is a Chinese city, Wang Lung does not feel at ease; he considers himself as a foreigner inside his own country due to the differences in the language and customs.

He lived in a city as alien as a rat in a rich man's house that is fed on scraps thrown away, and hides here and there and is never a part of the real life of the house.

As it was that, although a hundred miles are not so far as a thousand, and land road never so far as water road, yet Wang Lung and his wife and children were like foreigners in the southern city. It is true that the people who went about the streets had black hair and eyes as Wang Lung and all his family had, and as all did in the country where Wang Lung was born, and it is true that if one listened to the language of these southerners it could be understood, if with difficulty.

But Anwhei is not Kiangsu. In Anwhei, where Wang Lung was born, the language is slow and deep and it wells from the throat. But in Kiangsu city where they now lived the people spoke in syllables which spintered from their lips and from the ends of their tongues. And where Wang Lung's fields spread out in slow and leisurely harvest twice a year of wheat and rice and a bit of corn and beans and garlic, here in the farms about the city men urged their land with perpetual stinking fertilizers of human wastes to force the land to a hurried bearing of this vegetable and that besides their rice.<sup>28</sup>

The comparison of himself with "a rat in a rich man's house" describes his own feelings towards the city. He does not belong to it, no matter how similar he speaks and looks like he does not suit this kind of life; in fact, he becomes a shadow of city life with no opportunities but pulling a riksha.

We can also notice through this extract how simple Miss Buck's style is, the vocabulary and structure are as plain as the main character. It takes her one paragraph to tell us that although externally Wang is similar to

the others, he does not share what most people feel, as a matter of fact, he stands as an outsider. In a way not so outcast as the real foreigners - the Westerns, but he is an outsider. In the second paragraph we can, in a way, detect a kind of criticism for those who do not respect the earth and its natural growth of providing the men their food at its natural speed. The north employs fertilizer, according to what we can apprehend *by* this criticism, to help the land acquire what it is taken by its crops but not to the point of doing any harm to their dear land. They are patient enough to wait for what their soil gives them with no need to hurry it to produce more than its nature.

Talking about the foreigners, we learn that the nationalists want to send them away from China through some events that happen and which Wang does not clearly understand. There are some young Chinese in the streets that distribute a lot of papers printed in characters unknown to Wang, for he does not read; these men shout curses to the white people calling them invaders and also demanding the poor Chinese to realize the condition of their lives, which in a way is of no use, for the poor ~~are~~ are accustomed to bearing their own fate and are not very much interested in modifying their lives if fate does not turn their destinies over. These young men also claim for revolution. Wang also learns there is a war somewhere and that soldiers are summoning people to join the battles.

As a matter of fact "summon up" is not the correct word, for the soldiers grab those who are "available" in the streets, those who have strength enough to carry their belongings and guns to the battlefields. In fact Wang Lung witnesses one of these violences and gets scared

*...He saw one day, when he pulled his riksha empty down a street looking for a customer, a man, seized as he stood by a small band of armed soldiers, and when the man protested, the soldiers brandished knives in his face, and while Wang Lung watched in amazement, another one was seized and another, and it came to Wang Lung that those who were seized were all common fellows who worked with their hands, and while he stared, yet another man was seized, and this one a man who lived in the hut nearest his own against the wall.*

*Then Wang Lung perceived suddenly out of his astonishment that all these men were as ignorant as he as to why they were thus being taken, willy nilly, whether they would or not.<sup>29</sup>*

Wang gets terrified not of being taken to a war but of "dying upon a battlefield and his blood spilled out, and nevermore able to see his own land."<sup>30</sup> The mere thought of never returning to his land frightened him deeply and reinforces, in a way, his inner desire to leave this hideous city to return to the quiet and gratifying land of his. He makes up his mind to set for the north the first opportunity he has. Later he partakes of a robbery to a rich man's house and happens to stand before the owner

*"Save a life- save a life- do not kill me. I have money for you -much money-"*

*It was this word "money" which suddenly brought to Wang Lung's mind a piercing clarity. Money! Aye, and he needed that! And again it came to him clearly, as a voice speaking, "Money - the child saved- the land!"*

*He cried out suddenly in a harsh voice such as he did not himself know was in his breast, "Give me the money then!"*

*And the fat man rose to his knees, sobbing and gibbering, and feeling for the pocket of the robe, and he brought forth his yellow hands dripping with silver and Wang Lung held out the end of his coat and received it. And again he cried out in that strange voice that was like another man's, "Give me more!"*

*And again the man's hands came forth dripping with silver and he whimpered, "Now there is none left and I have nothing but my wretched life," and he fell to weeping, his tears running like oil down his hanging cheeks.<sup>31</sup>*

Wang Lung does grab that money; however, it is meaningful that he has not taken it for greed but for his intense desire of going back to his land to start a new life and to feel relieved while working on his soil. Not once has the idea of owning money to become powerful passed his mind; nevertheless the incident represented by the possibility of joining his land has driven him to act this way. In fact he does not care what happens in the south, for he can only envision their future in Anwhei back home.

The time spent in Kiangsu is not worth recollecting, as a matter of fact it represents a bracket in Wang Lung's life because it has not changed him to the extent that at the time he feels his land under his feet, he forgets the

past, nothing matters but his working from now on. He returns to his homeland and all the outside events that take place around the country lose importance, life goes on inside his family and village as if nothing has happened. Inwardly nothing has changed, for Wang Lung still keeps his greed for more land; and this attachment to the soil allows him to keep on living.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>LIN YUTANG, p.172.

<sup>2</sup>BUCK, Pearl S. The Good Earth. New York, John Day, 1965. 316p. p.67.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.228.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.253.

<sup>5</sup>LIN YUTANG, p.186-7.

...the respect for old age, ..., is always something touching and Professor A.E. Ross has noted that the old man in China is a most imposing figure, more dignified and good to look at than the old men in the West, who are made to feel in every way that they have passed the period of their usefulness and are now gratuitously fed by their children, as if they had not done their bit in bringing up the young in their prime of life! Or else, these old men of the West are continually shouting to people that they are still young in spirit, which of course makes them look ridiculous. No well-bred Chinese would gratuitously offend an old man, just as no well-bred Western gentleman would intentionally offend a lady. Some of that fine feeling is now gone, but a great part of it still remains in most Chinese families. That accounts for the poise and serenity of old age. China is the one country in which the old age is a thousand times better than all the old-age pensions in the world.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.176.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.176.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.34

<sup>9</sup>BUCK, op.cit., p.259.



<sup>10</sup>LIN YUTANG., p.191-2.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.189.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.203.

<sup>13</sup>BUCK., p.184-5.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.265.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.52.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.55.

<sup>17</sup>LIN YUTANG, op.cit., p.200.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.201.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.199-200.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.201

<sup>21</sup>DOYLE, p.40.

<sup>22</sup>BUCK, p.61.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.56.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.57.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.58.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.79.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.82

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.92.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.109-10.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p.111.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.119.

### 3. ATTACHMENT TO EARTH

In this chapter we are going to make an attempt to demonstrate how much "Earth" represents to Wang Lung and to his Chinese background. "Earth" is the root to which a man attaches himself, in the last instance it stands for his universe unifying himself to the cosmos in a perfect fusion. It is quite clear the way it is shown in the novel that at the time a man unroots himself from his land he starts decaying in such a way that we can perceive the parallel between the fall of the House of Hwang and Wang's ascension through the former's rid of their land and Wang's acquisition of it.

Mr. Paul A. Doyle says in his chapter that deals with "The Good Earth" in his book Pearl S. Buck

*As a roman-fleuve, The Good Earth carries us through several generations of the Wang clan and analyzes the growth of the family as it develops in power and wealth. Such families in China, Miss Buck declared, begin on the land; and, if favorable circumstances present themselves, the family increases in stature and importance. But, she insists, such families develop from their land roots; they grow*

*from the soil.*

*The cyclic movement emphasized in the development of the Wang family is counterpoised by the decline of the House of Hwang.<sup>1</sup>*

Wang Lung comes to the House of Hwang on his wedding day and admires such greatness and beauty in comparison to his little plain earthen house. He is mistreated then, nevertheless he reacts and works to improve his life, as it is shown at the first opportunity he has he goes to that house to buy a plot of land. He continues acquiring more land, at last he owns all the land that once belonged to the Hwang family.

This attachment to the earth has come to Wang Lung through thousands of years, for China is essentially a rural country, the population of which consists of ploughers basically. Miss Buck reinforces it in her introduction to Mr. Lin Yutang's My Country and My People's veracity

*The young intellectuals are beginning to discover their own masses. They are beginning to find that life in the countryside, in small towns and villages is the real and native life of China, fortunately still fairly untouched with the mixed modernism which has made their own lives unhealthy. They are beginning to feel themselves happy that there is this great foundation in their nation, and to turn to it eagerly for fresh inspiration. It is new to them, it is delightful, it is humorous, it is worth having, and above all, it is purely Chinese.<sup>2</sup>*

A Chinese never leaves aside the rural aspect that in a way accompanies his life. Earth stands at the background of those who have left it, for they keep in their minds one day of returning to it. It may seem to be a kind of regionalism that has grown among the cultivated; a nationalism that was neglected due to the "modernism" as it is stated by Miss Buck. This attachment to the soil has fortunately never occurred to the simple men of the country and who were not affected by the progress brought along by the Westerns. These men have kept their love and respect to their land, no matter what misfortunes turn up; they are confident in which concerns their lives and are sure of having their esteem back through the earth's recognition with good crops and harvests.

Mr. Lin Yutang describes this belief and respect to the earth through a Chinese's eyes and considers it as both an inner and characteristic aspect of the Chinese

*What seems still more important is the fact that the ruling class not only came from the country but also returned to the country, as the rural mode of life was always regarded as the ideal. This rural ideal in art, philosophy and life, so deeply imbedded in the Chinese general consciousness, must account in a large measure for the racial health today. Did the creators of the Chinese pattern of life do more wisely than they knew in maintaining a level between civilization and the primitive habits of living? Was it their sound instinct which guided them to choose the agricultural civilization, to hate mechanical ingenuity and love the simple ways of life, to invent the comforts of life without being enslaved by them, and to preach from generation to generation.*

*their poetry, painting and literature the  
"return to the farm"?*

*For to be close to nature is to have physical  
and moral health. Man in the country does  
not degenerate; only man in the cities does.  
To scholars and well-to-do families in the  
cities, persistently the call of the good  
earth comes. The family letters and instructions  
of well-known scholars abound in such counsel,  
and reveal an important aspect of the Chinese  
civilization, as aspect which subtly but  
profoundly accounts for its long survival.<sup>3</sup>*

The close contact to nature represents their ideal in the last instance; this is one of the reasons why China seems to have kept its feudal system throughout centuries. All social classes are aware of the Earth's importance, it does not matter how long one is apart from his land. For Earth always stands at the back as if sure of this person's return. As it was said by Mr. Lin Yutang, a countryman never degenerates, for Earth is his root and which he can always turn to; furthermore this ideal does not only concern those who are in direct contact with the earth but it extends to the learned and wealthy citizens.

This rural feature of the Chinese civilization and ideal was thoroughly grasped by Miss Buck's sensitiveness, she has conveyed it into her books - those which deal with Chinese life and characters. Her protagonists are mainly countryfellows, and the scenery is generally set in the country; the plots flow slowly as if to accompany the character's development in a matter-of-fact and natural sequence. These men do not lose their patience and humbleness, and their peaceful attitude towards life before

any misfortunes, for their ideal is much more stronger than any terrain calamities. In fact they are well-known for their endurance, which in a way is an example for the Westerns and their rushed and constant worry of solving any oncoming problems. Maybe this is one of the reasons why the Westerns tend to look at the Eastern civilization to think of their attitudes over in order to apprehend why these people have survived and remained "wholly". The Chinese philosophy and attachment to their dear earth, and their way of facing life differ a great deal from the Westerns, due to the latter's commitment to mechanicism and modernism. Moreover, the Eastern civilization has mastered the appeal to simplicity and their search for happiness, achieved in close contact with nature and their care for it, for it is no use just possessing land without taking care of it.

Miss Buck has understood this ideal of the earth's goodness and generosity to such an extent that she names her famous novel *The Good Earth*. Furthermore, her characters - Wang Lung and O-lan are so attached to their soil that they are healed of any sorrows and annoyances only by working on it, which demonstrates thus their love and care; in retribution, they acquire new strength. Therefore, not only does Earth provide them food to survive physically, but it also provides them a kind of spiritual source.

Wang Lung's days in the South are not good, even

so he bears them because he has his land waiting for him

*But at night, when he counted out all his money in his hand he had only a penny above the rent of the riksha, and he went back to his hut in great bitterness, saying to himself that for labor greater than the labor of a day in a harvest field he had earned only one copper penny. Then there came flooding over him the memory of his land. He had not remembered it once during this strange day, but now the thought of it lying back there, far away it is true, but waiting and his own, filled him with peace, and so he came to his hut.<sup>4</sup>*

Another occasion that Wang Lung is in need of some kind of relief for his troubles turn out when a swarm of locusts happen to come to their fields in addition to his household affairs, it is the Earth that achieves to calm him down. He works hard to detain the locusts' advance, though of no use because of the many millions of them.

*Nevertheless, for all this fighting Wang Lung had this as his reward: the best of his fields were spared and when the cloud moved on and they could rest themselves, there was still wheat that he could reap and his young rice beds were spared and he was content...*

*...For seven days he thought of nothing but his land, and he was healed of his troubles and his fears, and he said to himself calmly,*

*"Well, every man has his troubles and I must make shift to live with mine as I can, and my uncle is older than I and he will die, and three years must pass as they can with my son and I shall not kill myself." And he reaped his wheat and the rains came and the young green rice was set into the flooded fields and again it was summer.<sup>5</sup>*

O-lan, in her turn, also experiences relief through working on the Earth. If she has not felt happy in her life, at least she feels at ease in her soil. She comes back to plough a short time after she had her first baby bringing him along to the fields. O-lan's integration to the Earth is more impressively detailed in what concerns her looking. Miss Buck describes O-lan and her baby "as brown as the soil".

*She worked all day now and the child lay on an old torn quilt on the ground, asleep. When it cried the woman stopped and uncovered her bosom to the child's mouth, sitting flat upon the ground, and the sun beat down upon them both, the reluctant sun of late autumn that will not let go the warmth of summer until the cold of the coming winter forces it. The woman and the child were as brown as the soil and they sat there like figures made of earth. There was the dust of the fields upon the woman's hair and upon the child's soft black head. But out of the woman's brown breast the milk gushed forth for the child, as white as snow, and when the child suckled at one breast it flowed like a fountain from the other, and she let it flow. There was more than enough for the child, greedy though he was, life enough for many children, and she let it flow out carelessly, conscious of her abundance. There was always more and more. Sometimes she lifted her breast and let it flow out upon the ground to save her blothing, and it sank into the earth and made a soft, dark, rich spot in the field. The child was fat and good-natured and ate of the inexhaustible life his mother gave him.<sup>6</sup>*

O-lan is at peace with both her son and nature close to her; there seems to be no difference between these three,



for they are integrated in such a way that no distinction is clearly delineated. The woman's and the child's figures fuse with the Earth making up a unity. The contrast of O-Lan's brownness with the white milk that runs down from her breasts is beautifully conveyed in the second paragraph; moreover, the mention of "fountain" reinforces the image of abundance and natural source. O-lan is plain but this passage of her feeding her child moves us so much that we think of her as beautiful, a beauty not shown by her appearance but an inner beauty that comes up from her vitality, an energy brought up by nature.

Earth gives O-lan energy and sources to stand her pains. There is a passage in which Miss Buck writes what O-lan does on the day that Wang Lung brings his second wife into his earthen house. O-lan is very depressed and hurt; yet she does not complain, instead she goes to the fields. Back home she feels better though not completely content but the hard work has enabled her to bear this humiliation.

*All this time O-lan had not come near the house. At dawn she had taken a hoe from the wall and she called the children and she took a little cold food wrapped up in a cabbage leaf and she had not returned. But when night came on she entered, silent and earth-stained and dark with weariness, and the children silent behind her, and she said nothing to anyone, but she went into the kitchen and prepared food and set it upon the table as she always did, and she called the old man and put the chopsticks in his hand and she fed the poor fool and then she*

*ate a little with the children. Then when they slept and Wang Lung still sat at the table dreaming she washed herself for sleeping and at last she went into her accustomed room and slept alone upon her bed.<sup>7</sup>*

This passage contrasts a lot with the one that she feeds her first son, nevertheless, this one touches us more, less for its beauty but for the great sorrow that takes place in O-lan's heart. It is, in fact, a creeping and sad picture of a woman who has been left aside without much consideration. Even so, she tries to cheer herself up in the fields; in a way, she succeeds to get some relief though the pain is too heavy to be discharged at once. The sentences in this paragraph corroborate to the description of O-lan's suffering too, for they seem to be "crawling" linked by the connective "and". We can notice how many times it is employed, as if to "drag" one action to the other without any impact; as a matter of fact, there are only four long sentences with split sentences connected with "and". If on the one hand the picture is of an unhappy human-being, on the other hand it is conveyed that she has found a way-out going to work hard on the Earth. O-lan comes back home so tired that her body aches more than her heart; thus, she is not able to think about the matter further, at least not today that the wound is too new and deep.

Miss Buck's use of the four seasons matching with

the plot is quite recurrent, this is in fact a very romantic procedure - the resource of seasonal cycles together with Wang Lung's cycle of life. We can feel that what has impelled Miss Buck to write about the Chinese is not only a matter of preference but it is rather something deeper, it is really a sheer admiration and love for this nation. Since the Chinese consider their land and landscape very much, it is quite natural that the author has incorporated it in herself. Thus, love and nature come together and they are as a matter of fact the main subject-matters of the Romantics. Besides, she was living in China, very far away from America and Europe where great changes in thought and literature took place. Her literary background was, in a way, restricted to the only books she had at home and those available in libraries, which were not many. Moreover, she did not have access to the current books and magazines or newspapers. She is thus mainly influenced by the Romantics and their appeal to nature.

*The Good Earth*, starts in spring and on the protagonist's wedding day in the early morning

...He sprang up and pushed aside the curtains of his bed. It was dark, ruddy dawn, and through a small square of a window, where the tattered paper fluttered, a glimpse of bronze sky gleamed. He went to the hole and tore the paper away.  
 "It is spring and I do not need this," he muttered.  
 He was ashamed to say aloud that he wished

*the house to look neat on this day. The hole was barely large enough to admit his hand and he thrust it out to feel of the air. A small soft wind blew gently from the east, a wind mild and murmurous and full of rain. It was a good omen. The fields needed rain for fruition. There would be no rain this day, but within a few days, if this wind continued, there would be water. It was good. Yesterday he had said to his father that if this brazen, glittering sunshine continued, the wheat could not fill in the ear. Now it was as if Heaven had chosen this day to wish him well. Earth would bear fruit.<sup>8</sup>*

So it is spring, a time when crops and flowers bloom, together with Wang Lung's blooming to life. Spring also conveys a starting point; on this day Wang Lung begins a new life, which according to the weather and the coming rain it is going to prosper. Nature seems to bless him and his life from now on, Heaven is on his side, his life will turn out well as much as "earth would bear fruit". From this paragraph we can select some very important statements like: "It is spring", "It was good omen", "It was good.", and "Earth would bear fruit." Now let us consider Wang Lung as one that is so attached to the earth that he fuses with the earth to such an extent that they do not have any differences; thus, we can think of him as the image of the earth. Therefore, "Earth would bear fruit" conveys that Wang Lung will have offsprings. Notice how true this picture turns out to be on the day O-lan announces her pregnancy

...She smoothed a last furrow slowly. Then in her usual plain way she said, straight out, her voice flat and more than usually plain in the silent evening air,

"I am with child."

Wang Lung stood still. What was there to say to this thing, then! She stooped to pick up a bit of broken brick and threw it out of the furrow. It was as though she had said, "I have brought you tea," or as though she had said, "We can eat." It seemed as ordinary as that to her! But to him - he could not say what it was to him. His heart swelled and stopped as though it met sudden confines. Well, it was their turn at this earth!<sup>9</sup>

It is also interesting the way Wang Lung's father comments about the news:

The old man blinked for a moment and then comprehended, and cackled with laughter. "Heh-heh-heh - "he called out to his daughter-in-law as she came, "so the harvest is in sight!"<sup>10</sup>

Spring conveys rebirth for Nature and a turning-point for the characters. It is also spring when Wang Lung's family comes back from the South to have a new start on their land. Wang Lung is eager to begin working and buys the necessary tools, and in the evening he enjoys himself looking out at the beautiful landscape of his own land

Then in the evening he stood in the doorway of his house and looked across the land, his own land, lying loose and fresh from the winter's freezing, and ready for planting. It was full spring and in the shallow pool the frogs croaked drowsily. The bamboos at the corner of the house swayed slowly under

*a gentle night wind and through the twilight he could see dimly the fringe of trees at the border of the near field. They were peach trees, budded most delicately pink, and willow trees thrusting forth tender green leaves. And up from the quiescent, waiting land a faint mist rose, silver as moonlight, and clung about the tree trunks. At first and for a long time it seemed to Wang Lung that he wished to see no human being but only to be alone on his land.*<sup>11</sup>

In general terms, there are four aspects of the Earth that help us understand Wang Lung's characterization, and which show us the close relationship between them: in addition to relief for his sorrows and recklessness, happiness, fulfillment, and real love. These four together, in the end, give us a thorough picture of integration and fusion of Man and Nature.

For relief we have already given some examples in *The Good Earth*, so now let us detain a little bit in what we understand for happiness for Wang Lung. Nevertheless, it is quite important to point out what happiness means to the Chinese. Mr. Lin Yutang explains it in *My Country and My People*.

*The Chinese ideal of happiness was, then not the "exercise of one's powers along lines of their excellence" as was that of the Greeks, but the enjoyment of this simple rural life, together with the harmony of social relationships.*<sup>12</sup>

This is a very important point which distinguishes both civilizations of the East and the West. The Eastern civ-

ilization has a different point of view in which concerns happiness. A little poem dated from the sixteenth century quoted before the above comment of Mr. Lin Yutang explains better

*Life is complete  
With children at your feet;  
Just a handful of hay hides your cot.  
If land is sterile,  
To make it fertile,  
A young calf will surely help a lot.  
Teach thy sons to read, too, in spare hours,  
Not for fame nor for Mandarin collars.  
Brew your wine, plant bamboos, water flowers,  
Thus a house for generations of scholars.<sup>13</sup>*

It seems that there is no need for much learning if one has not grasped the meaning of life and how content a man can be just by praising and enjoying life as it is. The Chinese contemplate the beauty of Nature and try to bring it close to them in terms of practical life, which means that they see beauty in small things like a pond with golden fish in a court of a Chinese home, or a delicate embroidered picture hung on a wall. The beauty and delicacy are important because the Chinese see them harmoniously in Nature. That is one of the reasons why they considered beautiful a woman with tiny bound feet, because those women were in a way obliged to walk graciously with small paces to keep some balance. The harmony seems to convey in the last instance the supreme happiness, which in its turn lies in the basis of Man being very close to Nature.

On the other hand we have a quite different view

of the Westerns. They tend to praise their commitment to material things as an end and not as a means of becoming happy. This is a characteristic of a society that is turned to consumption, in which the number of belongings show how prosperous and close to happiness a person is. One of the criticisms that is hidden in Mr. Lin Yutang's comment is that the Westerns are so much concerned about the future, about what they can acquire in terms of both material and spiritual life that they do not enjoy the present life. For instance, the Western's preoccupation whether there is life after death, or that they work too hard to have a house to live in after a certain number of years, of purchasing many objects and appliances that they consider essential for their "happiness".

There is a paragraph in Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* in which he contrasts both viewpoints

*This realism and this attached-to-the-earth quality of the Chinese ideal of life has a basis in Confucianism, which, unlike Christianity, is of the earth, earth-born. For Jesus was a romanticist, Confucius a realist; Jesus was mystic, Confucius a positivist; Jesus was a humanitarian, Confucius a humanist. In these two personalities we see typified the contrast between Hebrew religion and poetry and Chinese realism and common sense. Confucianism, strictly speaking, was not a religion: it had a certain feelings toward life and the universe that bordered on the religious feeling, but it was not a religion. There are such great souls in the world who cannot get interested in the life hereafter or in the question of immortality or in the world of spirits in general. That type of philosophy could never satisfy the Germanic races, and certainly not the Hebrews,*



*but it satisfied the Chinese race - in general.*<sup>14</sup>

There is no point and no use saying which view is more correct, for each civilization has its own cultural bases. In short we could say that they differ mainly on how they observe and consider life and what it is extracted from the considerations and observations to reach happiness. The Chinese live intensively in accordance with their pattern and do not worry about remote future plans; in fact, they are interested in life as an "available" element from which they learn the meaning of their existence and apprehend that to be happy is to be in harmony with both Nature and the social organization they live in. The Westerns, on the other hand, think over, they meditate over the significance of life. While one contemplates, the other meditates.

In terms of our main character in *The Good Earth* - Wang Lung, he fits properly in his Chinese background, for he is wholly happy and joyful whenever he is in close contact with his soil. No place is better than his land, and nothing seems to matter more than working on it. There are plenty of passages that illustrate this feeling, like the one that takes place in his full manhood. It is the time he falls in love with Lotus and brings her home to make her his second wife. Wang Lung spends the whole summer with Lotus and satiates this passion.

It is interesting that Miss Buck presents autumn to set Wang Lung's full maturity. Autumn is the season when the fruits are ripe and ready to be plucked, and also it is considered the most beautiful season when the leaves get colored and fall from the trees and nature is preparing for winter. In relation to the human beings, autumn is the season that one is thoroughly mature, more controlled and self-confident, and rid of his inner impulses and passions.

*There came a day when summer was ended and the sky in the early morning was clear and cold and blue as sea water and a clean autumn wind blew hard over the land, and Wang Lung woke as from a sleep. He went to the door of his house and he looked over his fields. As he saw that the waters had receded and the land lay shining under the dry cold wind and under the ardent sun. Then a voice cried out in him, a voice deeper than love cried out in him for his land. And he heard it above every other voice in his life and he tore off the long robe he wore and he stripped off his velvet shoes and his white stockings and he rolled his trousers to his knees and he stood forth robust and eager and he shouted, "Where is the hoe and where is the plow? And where is the seed for the wheat planting? Come, Ching my friend - come call the men - I go out to the land!"<sup>15</sup>*

During summer there comes the flood, but at this time, Wang Lung is prepared through both his labour and labourmen and his riches. Therefore, he does not have anything to busy himself, for the water impedes himself and the workers to attend the soil. Thus, Wang Lung becomes

idle and consequently reckless and ill-tempered. He goes to the local tea-shop to divert his attention and to spend his spare time. In one of these excursions he sees Lotus, a beautiful girl that works there; Wang Lung falls in love immediately before such beauty and delicacy. Then he goes there every day; at last he manages to make a deal and brings Lotus to his house to a place already built for both.

At this point it is relevant to point out a Chinese tradition of handling matters. In matters like betrothal, marriage, and even trades business it is not advisable or even acceptable for a person to talk about the subject to the other one concerned face to face. It was necessary another person - a middleman as it is called. For instance, Wang Lung's father is the middleman that goes to the Great House of Hwang to ask for his son's betrothal with one of their slaves - O-lan. Another example of the need of an agent is presented the first time Wang Lung goes to the House of Hwang to set a business deal to buy some land for sale

*"Tell his Old Honor I have important business, tell him money is concerned!" the gateman had answered positively,*

*"All the money in the world would not tempt me to wake the old tiger. He sleeps with his new concubine, Peach Blossom, whom he has had but three days. It is not worth my life to waken him." And then he added somewhat maliciously, pulling at the hairs on his mole, "And do not think that silver will waken him - he has had silver under his hand since he was born."*

*In the end, then, it had had to be managed with the Old Lord's agent, an oily scoundrel whose hands were heavy with the money that stuck to them in passing.<sup>16</sup>*

Notice how naïve Wang Lung is this first time, for he does not even know that business ought to be dealt with an agent before. Later when he has another opportunity to go the Great House to purchase more land, he does not feel at ease because there is no agent between himself and the old man

*And Wang Lung perceived by the quality of the curse that it was the Old Lord himself, because he cursed as one accustomed to servants and slaves. Wang Lung answered, therefore, more humbly than before.*

*"Sir and lord, I am come on a little business not to disturb your lordship, but to talk a little business with the agent who serves your honor."*

*Then the Old Lord answered withouth opening any wider the crack through which he pursed his lips,*

*"Now curse him, that dog left me many months ago and he is not here."*

*Wang Lung did not know what to do after this reply. It was impossible to talk of buying land directly to the Old Lord, without a middleman, and yet the jewels hung in his bosom hot as fire, and he wanted to be rid of them and more than that he wanted the land.<sup>17</sup>*

Fortunately the situation and the tension are relieved soon after Cuckoo's appearance. She is the only one left in the Great House beside the old man; therefore, she plays the role of the middleman, though Wang Lung is quite reluctant at the beginning, but since he wishes the land he agrees

"Now about the money", said the woman sharply. But Wang Lung hesitated. He could not well speak before the Old Lord and this woman instantly perceived as she perceived everything more quickly than speech could be made about it, and she said to the old man shrilly, "Now off with you!" And the aged lord, without a word, shambled silently away, his old velvet shoes flapping and off at his heels, coughing as he went.<sup>18</sup>

To settle the business for Lotus's coming to his farm, Wang Lung turns to his uncle's wife. Although he does not go well along with her he does not have any other solution, for she is the only one fit for this purpose

...He would buy [Lotus] and bring her to his house and make her his own so that no other man could come in to her and so could he eat and be fed and drink and be satisfied. And he rose up at once from his bed and he went out and motioned secretly to the wife of his uncle and he said, when she had followed him outside the gate and under the date tree where none could hear what he had to say,

"I listened and heard what you said in the courts and you are right. I have need of more than that one and why should I not, seeing that I have land to feed us all?"

She answered volubly and eagerly,

"And why not, indeed? So have all men who have prospered. It is only the poor who must needs drink from one cup." Thus she spoke, knowing what he would say next, and he went on as she had planned,

"But who will negotiate for me and be the middleman? A man cannot go to a woman and say, 'Come to my house'."

To this she answered instantly,

"Now do you leave this affair in my hands. Only tell me which woman it is and I will manage the affair."<sup>19</sup>

This way, Lotus comes to Wang Lung's and he finally wearies himself with her. Of course it is quite impossible to split exactly the point that Earth represents relief to Wang Lung and where it starts to stand for happiness. We have divided in four just for didactic purpose, for they intermingle as we can see in this beautiful passage

*As he had been healed of his sickness of heart when he came from the southern city and comforted by the bitterness he had endured there, so now again Wang Lung was healed of his sickness of love by the good dark earth of his fields and he felt the moist soil on his feet and he smelled the earthy fragrance rising up out of the furrows he turned for the wheat. He ordered his laborers hither and thither and they did a mighty day of labor, ploughing here and ploughing there, and Wang Lung stood first behind the oxen and cracked the whip over their backs and saw the deep curl of earth turning as the plow went into the soil, and then he called to Ching and gave him the ropes, and he himself took a hoe and broke up the soil into fine loamy stuff, soft as black sugar, and still dark with wetness of the land upon it. This he did for the sheer joy he had in it and not for any necessity, and when he was weary he lay down upon his land and he slept and the health of the earth spread into his flesh and he was healed of his sickness.*

.....  
*He ate his evening rice all stained as he was with the earth and unwillingly he washed himself even before he slept. And washing his body he laughed again, for he washed it now for no woman, and he laughed because he was free.<sup>20</sup>*

This excerpt describes exactly what Earth is to Wang Lung, how zealous he is for his land, and how much he obtains in retribution. Earth heals his sicknesses and makes him

fell free and happy; furthermore, it shows Wang Lung's attachment to the Earth. We have mentioned manhood and happiness which report us to a kind of fulfillment, self-realization at maturity.

Wang Lung has always felt a kind of impotence towards the Great House of Hwang since the first time he had it before his eyes. Even when he has already become prosperous and greatly esteemed by the villagers, he still feels ill at ease whenever he thinks of the Great House. In a way that house represents the symbol of his realization; of course, not only the building but also the land that surrounds it and which once belonged to the Hwang family. He has been afraid of it though innerly very much attracted by its majesty. The idea of having it as his own gives him great pleasure and pride.

*Never had Wang Lung forgotten that once he had gone crawling into that great house and stood ashamed in the presence of those who lived there so that he was frightened of even the gateman, and this had remained a memory of shame to him all his life and he hated it. Through all his life he had the sense that he was held in the eyes of men a little lower than those who lived in the town, and when he had stood before the Old Mistress of the great house, this sense became crisis. So when his son said, "We could live in the great house" the thought leaped into his mind as though he saw it actually before his eyes, "I could sit on that seat where that old one sat and from whence she bade me stand like a serf, and now I could sit there and so call another into my presence."*

*And he mused and he said to himself again, "This I could do if I wished."*

*And he toyed with the thought and he sat*

*silent and he did not answer his son, but he put tobacco in his pipe and lit it with a spill that stood ready and he smoked and he dreamed of what he could do if he wished. So not because of his son and not because of his uncle's son he dreamed that he could live in the House of Hwang, which was to him forever the great house.<sup>21</sup>*

Wang Lung has accomplished his dream. Let us go back to the first time he comes to the great house to start his estate and, finally, bit by bit acquiring all the lots including the largest part of the house itself.

*"That land of my uncle's," said Wang Lung loudly, "I would not have it. He has been dragging a crop out of it in this way and that for twenty years and not a bit has he put back of manure or bean cake. The soil is like lime. No, I will buy Hwang's land." He said "Hwang's land" as casually as he might have said "Ching's land", - Ching, who was his farmer neighbor. He would be more than equal to these people in the foolish, great, wasteful house. He would go with silver in his hand and he would say plainly, "I have money. What is the price of the earth you wish to sell?" Before the Old Lord he heard himself saying to the Old Lord's agent, "Count me as anyone else. What is the fair price? I have it in my hand." And his wife, who had been a slave in the kitchens of that proud family, she would be wife to a man who owned a piece of the land that for generations had made the House of Hwang great.<sup>22</sup>*

In a way we can say that Wang Lung fulfills his desire, since he purchases all the remaining land of the Hwangs as soon as he learns it is for sale



"And the land?" asked Wang Lung as last, quivering with his eagerness.

"The land?" said the man blankly. To this shopkeeper land meant nothing at all.

"Is it for sale?" said Wang Lung impatiently.

"Oh, the land!" answered the man with indifference, and then as a customer came in he rose and called as he went,

"I have heard it is for sale, except the piece where the family are buried for these six generations," and he went his way.

Then Wang Lung rose also, having heard what he came to hear, and he went out and approached again the great gates and the woman came to open to him and he stood without entering and he said to her,

"Tell me first this, will the Old Lord set his own seal to the deeds of sale?"

And the woman answered eagerly, and her eyes were fastened on his,

"He will - he will - on my life!"

Then Wang Lung said to her plainly,

"Will you sell the land for silver or for jewels?"

And her eyes glittered as she spoke and she said,

"I will sell it for jewels!"<sup>23</sup>

If on the one hand the Great House represents to Wang Lung's sons a symbol of status and recognition of the clan's importance before the villagers and countrymen, it certainly means a higher ideal for their father, as if he had been chasing an award all his life and had finally reached and obtained it. Wang Lung succeeds to the extent that Earth stands for a symbol of his fulfillment. Earth becomes an obsession, for we cannot forget how greedy Wang Lung becomes as he gets rich; in fact, before becoming a wealthy man he has already set up his mind of not disposing any part of his land even at hard times. He prefers to starve instead of selling his land, and there

is an occasion that he has some spare silver which he uses to buy more land. This time he does not even tell O-Lan about the deal.<sup>24</sup>

The first time Wang Lung and his family face famine because of the prolonged drought, and because they were too poor to buy food it is his uncle who brings forth dealers to buy land in exchange for food. To this Wang Lung replies angrily his desire of not selling his land

*Wang Lung did not move. He did not rise nor in any way recognize the men who had come. But he lifted his head to look at them and he saw that they were indeed men from the town, dressed in long robes of soiled silk. Their hands were soft and their nails long. They looked as though they had eaten and blood still ran rapidly in their veins. He suddenly hated them with an immense hatred. Here were these men from the town, having eaten and drunk, standing beside him whose children were starving and eating the very earth of the fields; here they were, come to squeeze his land from him in his extremity. He looked up at them sullenly, his eyes deep and enormous in his bony, skull-like face. "I will not sell my land", he said.<sup>25</sup>*

Notice that he and his family are starving; even so, he will not dispose of his land. He prefers to have himself and the members of his family buried than selling his precious land

*"I shall never sell the land!" he shrieked at them.  
"Bit by bit I will dig up the fields and feed the earth itself to the children and when they die I will bury them in the land, and I and my wife and my old father, even he,*

*we will die on the land that has given us birth!"<sup>26</sup>*

O-lan, his wife, in her turn supports their wish of not selling the land as a matter-of-factly as ever

*And then suddenly O-lan came to the door and spoke to them, her voice flat and commomplace as though every day such things were. "The land we will not sell, surely," she said "else when we return from the south we shall have nothing to feed us. But we will sell the table and the two beds and the bedding and the four benches and even the cauldron from the stove. But the rakes and the hoe and the plow we will not sell, nor the land."<sup>27</sup>*

We ought to recognize this woman's way of handling matters. She does not think of possessing the land as obstinately as Wang Lung but regards it in a practical way, for there will be no use selling the land to get some money to provide them food for some little time, while at the time they are back from the south there will be no house for them to live in nor where to get food from. Wang Lung nevertheless always considers Earth as something more special as if this greed for more land pulls him forward. Since the first time he bought a small plot he has felt the same: "To those at the great house it means nothing, this handful of earth, but to me it means how much!"<sup>28</sup> From this day on, he is determined to buy as much land as possible

*And the wide difference that still lay between him and the great house seemed suddenly*

*impassable as the moat full of water in front of him, and as high as the wall beyond, stretching up straight and hoary before him. He was filled with an angry determination, then, and he said to his heart that he would fill that hole with silver again and again until he had bought from the House of Hwang enough land so that this land would be less than an inch in his sight. And so this parcel of land became to Wang Lung a sign and a symbol.*<sup>29</sup>

On the second time Wang Lung goes to the great house it is stated that: *"He bought with silver the desire of his heart. He had now a vast field of good land, for the new field was twice as large as the first. But more to him than its dark fertility was the fact that it had belonged once to the family of a prince."*<sup>30</sup>

He is so impressed by this amount of land that it seems to be the only subject on which he rationalizes. This way to possess land is to Wang Lung very meaningful and which is revealed in his own words as he learns the Hwangs are selling their land: *"Sell their land!" repeated Wang Lung, convinced. "Then indeed are they growing poor. Land is one's flesh and blood."*<sup>31</sup>

The first idea of Wang Lung being just a greedy person disperses a little bit and this picture acquires a new dimension, to a dimension that we apprehend Earth as an element inherent to our protagonist and which shows his own understanding of Life. To be departed from his land gains a new meaning, because it is not possible for himself to get rid of a part of his own self, since

Earth is his "flesh and blood". This attachment in a way keeps him alive and makes him feel sure that land is the only possession nobody can take from him if he does not want so.

*"They cannot take the land from me. The labor of my body and the fruit of the fields I have put into that which cannot be taken away. If I had the silver, they would have taken it. If I had bought with the silver to store it, they would have taken it all. I have the land still, and it is mine."*<sup>32</sup>

In the last instance, Earth stands for a possession that no one and nothing can take away from its owner. Once O-lan defines what Earth is to both: *"I must die sometime anyway. But the land is there after me."*<sup>33</sup> Therefore, we learn that Earth is their driving power, which pulls them forward and ahead. Earth is "one's flesh and blood", but even so one's flesh dies. However, land is not perishable as one's body is, for it remains for generations. Besides, the descendants may remember the dead and be close to their ancestors while they are close to their land. Otherwise, if one unroots from his land, the family experiences fall. Wang Lung, for instance, panickes when, in the end, close to his last days of old age, he suspects his sons want to sell the land when he is gone.

*"It is the end of a family when they begin to sell the land," he said brokenly. "Out of the land we came and into it we must go - and if you will hold your land you can*

*live - no one can rob you of land -"*  
*And the old man let his scanty tears dry*  
*upon his cheeks and they made salty stains*  
*there. And he stooped and took up a handful*  
*of the soil and held it and he muttered,*  
*"If you sell the land, it is the end."<sup>34</sup>*

Once again it is necessary to mention the link between one's care for his land and the idea of the steadiness of his family. Even Cuckoo, a slave and the last one who remains beside the Old Lord in the Great House of Hwang is aware that the Hwang's clan has been decaying throughout generations because they have neglected their soil which provided them food and riches. She says:

*"But all this was not a sudden thing. All during the lifetime of the Old Lord and of his father the fall of this house has been coming. In the last generation the lords ceased to see the land and took the moneys the agent gave them and spent it carelessly as water. And in these generations the strength of the land has gone from them and bit by bit the land has begun to go also."<sup>35</sup>*

Behind these words we learn the relationship between a person being careful with his land and the strength of a family. The steadiness diminishes proportionally as there is a reduction of attendance on the soil. In the case of Wang Lung's care, this attachment is as one of those four characteristics of the Earth to him mentioned before.

It is, in fact, in the last instance, his real love, what

he really cares for, not that kind of love that is only manifested in form of passion or lust but a feeling deep in his heart, and which has never turned against him in any form of sorrow or annoyance.

Wang Lung manages to have a second wife - a concubine in fact, he also manages to weary his passion for Lotus, to rest his body for the last time of lust with Pear Blossom - a very young and faithful maid that is his last companion, more like a daughter than a woman. In addition he manages to be indifferent to his sons and daughters-in-law's continuous quarrels about nonsenses.

This way, it is only on his land that Wang Lung actually feels at peace and shows how much love he has and gives. He completes a circular movement when he returns to his earthen house to spend his last years. He has experienced the comfort of a big house and its amenities, the beauty of the small delicacies and details in the Great House, the luxury of expensive clothes; nonetheless, all this does not seem to matter so much as his early home, for he misses his land and touching it. In the end nothing and nobody seem to be worth being taken into consideration but his land.

*Thus spring wore on again and again and vaguely and more vaguely as these years passed he felt it coming. But still one thing remained to him and it was his love for his land. He had gone rich. But his roots were in the land and although he forgot it for many months together, when spring came each year he must go out on to the land; and now*

*although he could no longer hold a plow or do anything but see another drive the plow through the earth, still he must needs go and he went. Sometimes he took a servant and his bed and he slept again in the old earthen house and in the old bed where he had begotten children and where O-lan had died. When he woke in the dawn he went out and with his trembling hands he reached and plucked a bit of budding willow and spray of peach bloom and held them all day in his hand."*<sup>36</sup>

Wang Lung's roots mingle with his love in the above paragraph to the extent that roots and love are embodied in, let us say, the characterization of Earth in relation to Wang Lung. To this point we have demonstrated how close Wang Lung as a character, as a man, is to the Earth that these two elements form a oneness. Therefore these two fuse to such an extent that we apprehend Wang Lung and his dear land as one. In addition, they accompany the same cyclical process of life alongside, let us say, as he tells his son: "*out of the land we came and into it we must go.*" It does actually happen in Wang's life, because he was born in the poor old earthen house, lived in it for many years, and comes back to spend his last days. So not only does Earth stand for his life but it turns to incorporate and to embody his own life, although land remains after death and a human body dies.

At this point it is interesting to bring out some concepts of Death to the Chinese and, extensively, to our protagonist in *The Good Earth*. Death does not frighten the Chinese as it does for most Westerns, or at least it



does not raise concerns nor future considerations. It is regarded as a natural process of a person's life: a man is born, lives and enjoys life at most, and dies. Notice that the Chinese concern is during lifetime and how to delight it as much as possible. Mr. Lin Yutang says that

*The Chinese humanists believe they have found the true end of life and are conscious of it. For the Chinese the end of life lies not in life after death, for the idea that we live in order to die, as taught by Christianity, is incomprehensible; nor in Nirvana, for that is too metaphysical; nor in the satisfaction of accomplishment, for that is too vainglorious nor yet in progress for progress' sake, for that is meaningless. The true end, the Chinese have decided in a singularly clear manner, lies in the enjoyment of a simple life, especially the family life, and in harmonious social relationships.*<sup>37</sup>

Thus, a Chinese does not look forward to becoming happy after death or to reaching total happiness after death. They do believe that they can be happy while they are still alive. This is one of the reasons for the Chinese behaviour, they tend not to get disturbed before any bad situations nor ill-mannered people. In fact, they simply neglect them and continue smiling as if nothing wrong is taking place. In this way, they tend to become a little cynical and not to take things too seriously; as a matter of fact, they do not like extremes but prefer the "mean". Mr. Lin Yutang says

The result of this worship of common sense is therefore a dislike of all extravagances of theory in thought and all excesses of conduct in morals. The natural consequence of this is the Doctrine of the Golden Mean, which is really the same as the "nothing too much" ideal of the Greeks. The Chinese word for moderation is chungho meaning "not extreme and harmonious," and the Chinese word for restraint is chieh which means "control to proper degree." In the Shuking (Book of History), supposed to contain the earliest Chinese political documents, the advice of Emperor Yao, on his abdication, to Emperor Shun was "Hold the mean." It is said that this emperor used to "listen to both extremes of counsel and then apply the mean to the people," which means that he would listen to two contradictory propositions, and give a fifty per cent discount of each. So important is the Doctrine of the Golden Mean to the Chinese that they called their own country the "Middle Kingdom." It is more than a geographical notion: it signifies a way of life which, by holding on to the mean, the normal and the essentially human, claims, as the old scholars did, that they have discovered all the essential truths of all schools of philosophy. The Doctrine of the Golden Mean covers all and develops all. It dillutes all theories and destroys all religions.<sup>38</sup>

This way, we can understand why this country does not worry about the extremes - such as Death, for instance. Mr. Lin Yutang explains that this attitude comes from the Chinese ideal of life which concerns full enjoyment of what life has to offer. Their great humanist Confucius once replied to the question of death in a very simple way "Don't know life - how know death".<sup>39</sup> The Chinese humanism is the mean position between religion and modernism in the last instance. It is an ideal

*That is neither particularly ambitious nor metaphysical, but nevertheless immensely real. It is, I must say, a brilliantly simple ideal, so brilliantly simple that only the matter-of-fact Chinese mind could have conceived it, and yet one often wonders how the West could have failed to see that the meaning of life lies in the sane and healthy enjoyment of it. The difference between China and the West seems to be that the Westerns have a great capacity for getting and making more things and a lesser ability to enjoy them, while the Chinese have a greater determination and capacity to enjoy the few things they have. This trait, our concentration on earthly happiness, is as much a result as a cause of the absence of religion. For if one cannot believe in the life hereafter as the consummation of the present life, one is forced to make the most of this life before the farce is over. The absence of religion makes this concentration possible.*<sup>40</sup>

This last explanation presents one of the great differences in thought, specifically in the question of Death, between the Easterns and the Westerns, and which, fortunately, Miss Buck does not attempt to point out, for she seems to be more concerned about approximating these two rather than providing and raising differences between them. She does not give us any hint of judgement or biases but presents facts that we take for granted in her books.

We have said something about the considerations of Death, so now we can introduce some points of the ceremonies and some procedures that come along. The period of mourning and the burial differ from the West. For instance, if "black" is the colour for the Westerns to pay respect and mourn their dead, it is the white colour

for the Orientals to show their reverence. In *The Good Earth*, Miss Buck presents some of the arrangements to settle the dead. Soon after O-lan's death Wang Lung fixes everything for her burial and mourning. About the burial it is interesting to mention that there is a Chinese tradition of calling a man to study the topography of a determined area to declare the right place to either build anything or to bury the dead. In addition, they also set the day for the ceremonies, which are in accord with the family's importance before the village and countrymen. As a matter of fact O-lan's ceremony is very pompous because of Wang Lung's position and esteem.

Another aspect that may strike a Westerner's attention is the way a Chinese behaves toward the presence of his coffin. If the presence of a coffin in a sick person's room makes a Westerner feel ill at ease because it shows this person is going to die, the fact that a coffin is in reach of a dying person is a comfort for a Chinese. They, indeed, interpret their coffin as an assurance of the opportunity of having a decent burial with a coffin already ordered. Wang Lung, for instance, asks his eldest son to provide his coffin and tells his son where to bury him

...My son, I have chosen my place in the earth, and it is below my father and his brother and above your mother and next to Ching, and I would see my coffin before I die".

Then Wang Lung's eldest son cried out

*dutifully and properly*

*"Do not say that word, my father, but I will do as you say."*

*Then his son bought a carved hewn from a great log of fragrant wood which is used to bury the dead in and for nothing else because that wood is as lasting as iron, and more lasting than human bones, and Wang Lung was comforted.*

*And he had the coffin brought into his room and he looked at it every day.*

*Then all of a sudden he thought of something and he said,*

*"Well, and I would have it moved out to the earthen house and there I will live out my few days and there I will die."<sup>41</sup>*

Notice that Wang Lung does not feel sorrow nor agony before his coffin but "comforted". He does not fear death but faces it as a natural process.

In *The Good Earth* death happens in winter; as we know, winter is the season when it is supposed that Nature dies, for the trees are leafless, the animals go to their dens, the birds fly to warmer places. Everything seems to be quiet, mute and silent; however, we should say that everything seems to be resting, for "rest" is a more suitable word to describe winter than "death". As a matter of fact there is no complete death in Nature but a period of quietness, of rest, preparing for the spring when the process of life starts all over. In the book it is in winter time that both O-lan and Wang Lung's father die. She dies slowly and very painfully

*But there was no sudden dying of life in O-lan's body. She was scarcely past the middle of her span of years, and her life would*

*not easily pass from her body, so that she lay dying on her bed for many months. All through the long months of winter she lay dying and upon her bed.*<sup>42</sup>

Before she dies she wishes her eldest son to be wed, so that she is sure there will be a child- another life, coming to this house. She does not complain of her pains nor that her days are passing but worries about a descendant for the family. In this way, to bear children implies in a continuation of the clan, which, brought to a broader sense, reports to us the ideal of immortality that seems to concern most people. A Chinese man is conscious of his lifetime and does not think about death as a threaten; he rather sees to his continuation in his offsprings, since there is no way out from death. That is why they praise their children, more precisely their male children and grandchildren.

We can notice that there is a great number of children in a Chinese home and that the adults seem not to mind their cries and bustles, since these annoyances lose importance face to the pride of having people to carry on the family's blood and name. Mr. Lin Yutang comments about the way the Chinese handle with children

*The Western man is like a maiden who has only herself to look after, and who consequently manages to look neat and tidy, while the Chinese man is like the daughter-in-law of a big family who has a thousand and one household obligations to attend to. It therefore breeds in us*

*soberness at an early age. It keeps our young in their places. It overprotects our children, and it is strange how few children rebel and run away.*<sup>43</sup>

Chinese children are spoilt in many ways. then, for there are no limits for their behaviour. The only thing that is really required of them is their respect for the old. Once again we have the clear picture of the family organization behind the Chinese social system, as if every detail, everything seemed to converge to the point of the basis - the family.

Wang Lung, for instance, does not like his uncle at all; even so, he pays respect to him even after his death, which is one of the "filial piety" duties. It is also during winter that Wang Lung's uncle dies; once again it is said that the presence of a coffin within of a dying man brings "comfort, knowing there was a place for his bones."<sup>44</sup> Mourning for this man is extended to the whole family, as it is described

*Then Wang Lung caused mourning to be made for the whole family and they wore the sign of mourning for a year, not because any truly mourned the passing of this old man who had never been anything but a care to them, but because it is fitting so to do in a great family when a relative dies.*<sup>45</sup>

We have said that winter is thought to be related to death, not a complete and vital death because the essence of life remains to bloom in Spring. Miss Buck

partakes of this thought in such a way that she lets us learn life is coming up after death

*Now as winter wore away and the waters began to recede so that Wang Lung could walk a-broad over his land it happened one day that his eldest son followed him and said to him proudly,*

*"There will be soon another mouth in the house and it will be the mouth of your grandson"*

*Then Wang Lung, when he heard this turned himself about and he laughed and he rubbed his hands together and said,*

*"Here is a good day, indeed!"*

*And he laughed again, and went to find Ching and tell him to go to the town to buy fish and good food and he sent it in to his son's wife and said,*

*"Eat, make strong the body of my grandson." 46*

This is how Wang Lung learns his first grandson is coming, which proves that life does not extinguish completely at all. A new life is to be born then, the essence of life does not perish, it is actually just waiting for the right time to spring up and develop. Miss Buck has, therefore, set up a complete matching of Man-Nature through the cyclical process of life and also of Man and Earth in the role a plougher - Wang Lung and his land to such an extent that both fuse and form a full and perfect unity. Birth and Death are thus put together the same way as Man and Nature, make up one, so that everything is set harmoniously in accordance with the laws of the universe. If there is a clash there will be a break in the stability of a family as it is shown in relation to the fall of the



Hwang's and the ascension of the Wangs due to the thorough integration and care of the protagonist for his land. Every detail in *The Good Earth* corroborates to the Chinese concept of Earth and its relation to men.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>DOYLE, p.39

<sup>2</sup>BUCK, Pearl. S. "Introdution". In: \_\_\_\_\_. Lin Yutang, p.X.

<sup>3</sup>LIN YUTANG, p.36.

<sup>4</sup>BUCK, p.90.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.201-2.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.36.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.171.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.3.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.28.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.28.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.122.

<sup>12</sup>LIN YUTANG; p.121.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p.121.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.104-5.

<sup>15</sup>BUCK, p.182.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.47.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.128

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.130

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.164-5.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.182-3.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.247.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.46.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.135.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.59-60.

He would, he told himself, in spite of gods and drought, do that which he had determined. His body he had broken and his sweat he had spilled for this handful of silver and he would do what he would with it. And he hurried to the House of Hwang and he met the land agent there

.....

...And this time he told no one, not even O-lan, what he had done.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.74.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.75.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.75.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.48.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.48.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p.60.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.45.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p.65.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.220

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p.307-8.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p.131.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.304.

<sup>37</sup>LIN YUTANG., p.100-1.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p.110-1.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p.102.

Nothing is more striking than the Chinese humanist devotion to the true end of life as they conceive it, and the complete ignorance of all theological or

methaphysical phantasies extraneous to it. When our great humanist Confucius was asked about the important question of death, his famous reply was, "Don't know life - how know death?"

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p.101.

<sup>41</sup>BUCK., p.305-6.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p.218-9.

<sup>43</sup>LIN YUTANG., p.176-7

<sup>44</sup>BUCK., p.273.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p.242.

#### 4. O-LAN AND WANG LUNG

Doubtless are O-lan and Wang Lung the main characters in *The Good Earth* because of Miss Buck's portrayal of them. O-lan, a mere slave of a wealthy family's house becomes the mistress of the great house due to her and her husband's industry and fierceness. The truth is that she is plain, there are no physical beauties in her; however, she is a beautiful character in terms of integrity and faithfulness both to her husband and to Earth. As it was said before, she is so close to Earth that her looking is that of "as brown as the soil". Miss Buck gives us a detailed description of O-lan at the first time Wang Lung goes to the great house to take his wife home. This way, we learn how plain O-lan is, though there are other virtues in her assured by the Old Mistress that she is a hard worker and that she does her duties silently

*She had a square, honest face, a short, broad nose with large black nostrils, and her mouth was wide as gash in her face. Her eyes*

were small and of a dull black color, and were filled with some sadness that was not clearly expressed. It was a face that seemed habitually silent and unspeaking, as though it could not speak if it would. She bore patiently Wang Lung's look without embarrassment or response, simply waiting until he had seen her. He saw that it was true there was no beauty of any kind in her face - a brown, common, patient face. But there were no pock-marks on her dark skin, nor was her lips split. In her ears he saw his rings hanging, the gold-washed rings he had bought, and on her hands were the rings he had given her. He turned away with secret exultation.  
Well, he had his woman!<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting the way Miss Buck describes both characters, for we do not have any physical descriptions of Wang Lung at all. We could therefore imagine him the way we think he is like. O-lan seems to be the material part while Wang Lung the essence and both form a oneness.

O-lan, according to the Chinese code, has the only right allowed to a woman- a married life. We learn through Mr.Lin Yutang that although a Chinese woman might be held not to be worthwhile and to the Westerns a rather oppressed human being, she is deserved to have a family life no matter her physical or social condition. On the other hand, if approaching this problem, one might question as Mr.Lin Yutang

*Have women really been suppressed in China, I often wonder?  
...Chinese women are not the type to be easily suppressed. Women have suffered many disadvantages, have been prevented from*

*holding stenographic positions, or judicial posts, but women have ruled nevertheless in the home, apart from those debauchee households where women have become toys. Even in these homes, some of the concubines manage to rule their lords. And what is still more important, women have been deprived of the every right, but they have never been deprived of the right to marry. To every girl born in China, a home of her own is provided. Society insists that even slave-girls should be married off at proper age. Marriage is women's only inalienable right in China, and with the enjoyment of that right, they have the best weapon for power, as wife and as mother.<sup>2</sup>*

Then, the only way to fulfill a woman's life is through marriage and we learn that most of the women indeed do their best. She is forced to serve her mother-in-law but when time comes to her to be the head of a great family, that is, to become the mother-in-law herself, she takes advantage of it and demands the most from her daughter-in-law. This feeling of a kind of "revenge" seems to make her endure her life.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that O-lan does not have any mother-in-law, but she is too good to behave as one described above. Not once has she complained about getting up early and serving her father-in-law and her husband. Later when she becomes mother-in-law she does not take advantage of her present position. She is attended by her future daughter-in-law because she is in need of somebody to help her while she is very sick. She tries to demand the least from her new relative. Not once has she shown herself as a mean character, for she is always generous to

her family. She even keeps attending her husband after his taking another woman - Lotus, in his favor. O-lan prepares food for him and keeps her household duties as well as sometimes she goes to plow.

Since the only place fit for a Chinese woman is indoors, she manages to get the most out of her confinement. It is said that *woman rules in the family, while man rules outside it.* " She may not rule her husband, for this is not allowed; nevertheless, she rules her children, for these are commanded to obey the "filial piety" principle. This way, a Chinese woman fulfills through motherhood. The notion of motherhood as fulfillment may not be agreed by Western women because these do not accept the idea of dependency of a woman to husband and children- they rather believe in freedom and independence. A Chinese thinks that

*What is of far more importance is the connection between women's seclusion and the ideal of womanhood. That ideal is the ideal of a "helpful wife and wise mother", a phrase very much held up to ridicule in modern China, especially by those modern women who desire above all "equality," "independence," "self-expression" and who regard wives and mothers as dependent upon men, representing thus a typical confusion of ideas.*

*Let us get the sexual relationships straight. It seems that a woman, when she becomes a mother, never thinks of her position as "dependent" on the pleasure of her husband. It is only when she ceases to be a mother that she feels utter dependency. There was a time even in the West when motherhood and bearing and rearing children were not despised by society or by the women them-*



*selves. A mother seems to fit in with her position, a very highly honored position, in the family. To bring a child into the world and lead him and guide him with her mother's wisdom into manhood is enough work for any human being in a sane-minded society. Why she should be regarded as "dependent" on man, either socially or economically, because she can do this noble work, and do it better than man, is a notion that is difficult to grasp.<sup>5</sup>*

It may be difficult to grasp but it is deeply understood by the Chinese woman and she certainly makes use of it if she happens to become mother.

No matter how plain O-lan is, she acquires a radiance of her own when she becomes mother. Even before her son is born she imagines their first visit to the Old Mistress of the Great House of Hwang. There is such a pride in herself that Wang Lung has never perceived before, which is revealed as she becomes a real woman.

*When I return to that house I will be with my son in my arms. I shall have a red coat on him and red-flowered trousers and on his head a hat with a small gilded Buddha sewn on the front and on his feet tiger-faced shoes. And I will wear new shoes and a new coat of black sateen and I will go into the kitchen where I spent my days and I will go into the great hall where the Old One sits with her opium, and I will show myself and my son to all of them.<sup>6</sup>*

This speech strikes Wang Lung who is accustomed to her long silences and short-cut words. He always wonders what she is thinking about or what her feelings are like. She

never demonstrates her fears or anguishes, for she bears any troubled situation as a matter-of-fact as possible. She is, we could say, a stoic character, one who carries her burden without rebelling against any misfortunes. She is built, as it seems at first, only to support Wang Lung's characterization in *The Good Earth*. However, we learn that she stands for more- she is the representative of the overburdened and "afflicted" class - the women, who do not have any rights in the context of the Chinese social hierarchy at all. Even so O-lan stands out, due to her inner power and becomes an important character. Through O-lan we also learn what *Endurance* means to the Chinese. On the chapter "The Chinese Character" in *My Country and My People* we learn some of the characteristics of the Chinese character: sanity, simplicity, love of nature, patience, indifference, old roguery, fecundity, industry, frugality, love of family life, pacifism, contentment, humour, conservatism, and sensuality.<sup>7</sup> Further on Mr. Lin Yutang explains that all these qualities can be summed up in one word "mellowness" reached through great patience and endurance.

*They are passive qualities, suggestive of calm and passive strength rather than of youthful vigor and romance. They suggest the qualities of a civilization built for strength and endurance rather than for progress and conquest. For it is a civilization which enables man to find peace under any circumstance, and when a man is at peace with himself, he cannot understand the*

*youthful enthusiasm for progress and reform. .  
It is the old culture of an old people who  
know life for what it is worth and do not  
strive for the unattainable.<sup>8</sup>*

O-lan does not want to have more than she has and is content with the little she owns. Her endurance nevertheless touches us. One of the passages that moves us a great deal is the one that describes the time O-lan gives birth to her fourth child - a girl. They cannot afford to have another mouth to feed; besides, it is another girl. She kills this child as soon as she is born after having carried her for nine months and having undergone times of starvation. She does it, for she sees no happy future for this child

*Wang Lung stooped and examined the handful of its body a wisp of bone and skin - a girl. He was about to say, "But, I heard it crying - alive"- and then he looked at the woman's face. Her eyes were closed and the color of her flesh was the color of ashes and her bones stuck up under the skin - a poor silent face that lay there, having endured to the utmost, and there was nothing he could say. After all, during these months he had only his own body to drag about. But this woman had endured what agony of starvation with the starved creature gnawing at her from within desperate for its own life.<sup>9</sup>*

We can also recall the first time her husband brought home his concubine, Lotus, to live with him in their house. O-lan wearies herself working out on the soil and at night Wang Lung still sat at the table dreaming she washed herself for sleeping and at last she went into her accustomed room and slept alone on her bed.<sup>10</sup> She has never commented about Wang Lung's unfaithfulness nor

even blamed him for having done so, nor has she ever cursed or complained about anything. The only time O-lan shows her ill-temperedness is when she sees Cuckoo before her. Cuckoo had mistreated her a great deal when O-lan served the great house. The first time it happens she goes to her husband

*I bore her haughty looks all during my youth in the great house and her running into the kitchen a score of times a day and crying out 'now tea for the lord' - 'now food for the lord' - and it was always this is too hot and that is too cold, and that is badly cooked and I was too ugly and too slow and too this and too that...<sup>11</sup>*

Since Wang Lung does not reply to her words she looked at him piteously and sadly out of her strange dumb eyes that were like a beast's eyes that cannot speak, and then she went away, creeping and feeling for the door because of her tears that blinded her.<sup>12</sup>

O-lan bears her humiliation silently and through her long periods of silence and her sad eyes we learn how much suffering there is in her. Even at her agonizing hours she does not think of herself but of the family's comfort, her pains are great but she makes as little noise as possible in order not to disturb the other members of the family.

Her humbleness and passivity arouse sympathy by the readers, who in their turn assume that

*O-lan can at least use passive resistance, and this she does in her inimitable fashion. O-lan has few pleasures yet her last wish before her death is to see her eldest son married so that a grandson may be conceived for her husband and a great grandson for her father-in-law. When the marriage has been accomplished, she can die happily with the consolation that, although she has been a slave, she herself has produced sons and there will be children for the future. In his critique of *The Good Earth*, Oscar Cargill emphasizes O-lan's devotion to her husband under all conditions and concludes with a fitting epitaph: "Earth of the earth-earthly, she triumphs in the end over her rivals, though her ugliness goes clear to the bone."<sup>13</sup>*

Once again the notion of the good earth being the powerful source which makes one triumph and be at peace with himself is stated. O-lan does triumph and is in a way fulfilled, for she is satisfied with what she has and does not expect more. O-lan moves us a great deal, because we do not only condole of her but we also can we feel that her gloomy figure trespasses a mere character in a novel to come out as a human creature.

Let us compare the relationship between O-lan and Wang Lung, and Wang Lung and Lotus. The former have a healthy and fertile relation. Their wedding ceremony is simple and before the god of Earth. By the way, this is the only relevant god mentioned throughout the book which again corroborates to the idea of Earth as the mighty and driving power which leads our characters.

Together this man and this woman stood before the gods of their fields. The woman watched the ends of the incense redden and turn grey. When the ash grew heavy she leaned over and with her forefinger she pushed the head of ash away. Then as though fearful for what she had done, she looked quickly at Wang Lung, her eyes dumb. But there was something he liked in her movement. It was as though she felt that the incense belonged to them both; it was a moment of marriage. They stood there in complete silence, side by side, while the incense smouldered into ashes.<sup>14</sup>

They were in a way blessed by their own god, and the moment of marriage is fulfilled because they have come to the complete union of two people making up one. It is a healthy union and Wang Lung prides of himself, for her body was beautiful, spare and big boned, yet rounded and soft.<sup>15</sup> There has always been a kind of connivance between themselves with the Earth at the background. They make a perfect couple as if they were one. When they work together on their soil there is no need of words, because their movements seem to be in tune following the same rhythm.

Moving together in a perfect rhythm, without a word, hour after hour, he fell into a union with her which took the pain from his labor. He had no articulate thought of anything; there was only this perfect sympathy of movement, of turning this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods. The earth lay rich and dark, and fell apart lightly under the points of their hoes. Sometimes they turned up a bit of brick, a splinter of wood. It was nothing. Some time, in some age, bodies of men and women had been buried there, houses had stood there, had fallen,

*and gone back into the earth. So would also their house, their bodies also. Each has his turn at this earth. They worked on, moving together - together - producing the fruit of this earth - speechless in their movement together.*<sup>16</sup>

With O-lan Wang Lung feels happy and at peace, for there is a deep understanding between both that their land is important, due to its frutification and provision both for their spiritual and material needs. Besides, O-lan's industry and fertility have brought Wang Lung good fortune. She bore children and helps him prosper both by sparing everything indoors and plowing with him outdoors.<sup>17</sup>

If on the one hand Wang Lung's and O-Lan's marriage seems to be a positive relationship, Wang Lung's and Lotus's can be interpreted as a negative one, because there are no hints of a healthy and deep relationship, for Wang Lung is only driven by passion that has ceased after some time. Moreover, Lotus does not bear children for him. She differs a great deal from O-Lan, for she is presented as a mean, selfish and ill-tempered character always prompt to display her petulance. Lotus worked at a sing-song shop where once Wang Lung went, while there was the flood and he was idle, for there was no way of going to work in the fields. His frequent visits to that house disturb him, for he never gets satisfied. He is even aware of how different his relationship to O-Lan and to Lotus is.

Yet never could he grasp [Lotus] wholly, and this it was which kept him fevered and thirsty, even if she gave him his will of her. When O-lan had come to his house it was health to his flesh and he lusted for her robustly as a beast for its mate and he took her and was satisfied and he never forgot her and he did his work content. But there was no such content now in his love for this girl, and there was no health in her for him. At night when she would have no more of him, pushing him out of the door petulantly, with her small hands suddenly strong on his shoulders, his silver thrust into her bosom, he went away hungry as he came. It was as though a man, dying of thirst, drank the salt water of the sea which, though it was water, yet dries his blood into thirst and yet greater thirst so that in the end he dies, maddened by his very drinking. He went into her and he had his will of her again and again and he came away unsatisfied.<sup>18</sup>

Wang Lung thinks correctly, for there was a satisfaction with O-lan. He only gets satisfied when he brings Lotus to live with him as a concubine but even so it is not complete because she still keeps ill-tempered and looks down on Wang Lung regarding him as a simple and dirty farmer. As he settles both women in his house he seems to rest a bit. Although he goes to Lotus to satisfy his passion he keeps having meals with O-lan.

...These women took their place in the house: Lotus for his toy and his pleasure and to satisfy his delight in beauty and in smallness and in the joy of her pure sex, and O-lan for his woman of work and the mother who had borne his sons and who kept his house and fed him and his father and his children.<sup>19</sup>



The matter of concubinage may strike Westerners' contempt, for they do not accept such idea as socially acceptable; however, we can understand how different the Chinese and the Westerns look over the question of unfaithfulness and also what marriage really implies in. For the Chinese, marriage is a family affair, and when marriage fails they accept concubinage, which at least keeps the family intact as a social unit. The West, in turn, regards marriage as an individual, romantic and sentimental affair, and therefore accepts divorce, which breaks up the social unit.<sup>20</sup> Family, as it was said, lies behind most of the Chinese attitudes; in this way, we can understand how the Chinese's logic works. Of course there may be conflicts between the wife and the concubine but certainly there will not be clashes in the family system which means that children may not be grieved for having their parents apart; besides, it is understood that only those who can afford two women under the same roof may have them in. Another great difference in attitude between the Chinese and the Westerns regarding marriage is that

*When marriage is unhappy the Oriental solves it by going to the sing-song girl or taking a concubine, while the Occidental solves it by keeping a mistress or having occasional escapades. The modes of social behavior are different, while the fundamental problems are curiously the same. What makes a difference is the social attitude, especially that of women, toward such behavior. Chinese take mistresses with public consent, while*

*Westerns have the decency not to talk about it.*<sup>21</sup>

In short, both face the same problem - that of unhappiness in marriage, but they adopt different attitudes, for one does not seem to have the dilemma of choosing between two women because he merely takes another woman - an act consented by both his wife and his countrymen, while the other tries to hide his love affairs as long as possible.

Although Wang Lung has taken a concubine he is not so indifferent before this situation, because he feels remorse for not loving O-lan, though he is aware of her devotion and appraisal of him. This reveals to us that Wang Lung is not so "strong" as if he were just a "hero", nonetheless he has his weaknesses as everybody. Wang Lung cannot help feeling remorse, though every time he feels so he becomes angry, for he thinks he does not deserve it because, in his opinion, he has been good to O-lan. When she becomes very sick, it is with uneasiness that he looks at her.

*He looked at her, not because she was a woman this time, and not that she was ugly and gaunt and yellow skinned. But he looked at her with some strange remorse, and he saw that she had grown thin and her skin was sere and yellow. She had always been a dark woman, her skin ruddy and brown when she worked in the fields.*<sup>22</sup>

His only and greatest fault seems to be of not having

loved her, maybe because she is not beautiful and now, at his mature age, he is fond of beauty since his money lets him appreciate it. He tries hard to show tenderness for this woman of his; nevertheless, he fails most of the times. However, for his children there is real tenderness out of him. For his fool daughter we can perceive how much care and love there is in him.

*"Poor fool- poor little fool -" And once when she essayed a weak smile with her toothless gums showing, he broke into tears and took into his lean hard hand her small claw and held the tiny grasp of her fingers over his forefinger. Thereafter he would sometimes lift her, all naked as she lay, and thrust her inside the scant warmth of his coat against his flesh and sit with her so by the threshold of the house, looking out over the dry, flat fields.<sup>23</sup>*

It is interesting that Wang Lung seems only to be able to feel real love for both his land and his children. He wishes the best for his children and does not allow anyone to mistreat them. Once Wang Lung's children enter Lotus's court, her reaction is of screaming and cursing at them - mainly at the fool one. This incident annoys their father and represents another point against Lotus, and also helps Wang Lung to cool a bit his passion for her. In turn, he is very rough with his words, consequently, their relationship has never been good as before.

*"I will not hear my children cursed, no and not by anyone and not even my poor fool, and"*

not by you who have no son in your womb for any man." And he gathered the children together and said to them, "Now go out, my son and my daughter, and come no more to this woman's court, for she does not love your father either." And to the elder girl he said with great gentleness, "And you, my poor fool, come back to your place in the sun." And she smiled and he took her by the hand and led her away.<sup>24</sup>

He does care for his children; moreover, he is very proud that although he was a poor man and not able to read nor to write he has sons that are able to read and to write the difficult written characters in Chinese. It is also significant the names his sons received at school: *for the eldest, Nung En, and for the second Nung Wen, and the first word of each name signified one whose wealth is from the earth.*<sup>25</sup> It is not possible to separate Wang Lung in any circumstances from the earth- there is not only personal attachment to it but also his descendants have to be related to it. This seems to prove that Wang Lung and his land would never be apart no matter which occasion or event might occur.

Miss Buck presents Wang Lung's characterization in a chronological sequence. He goes through various phases: youth, manhood, and old age. In each he convinces us, for he experiences and is subjected to most of human feelings, ambitions, and also moments of depression and despair, and defeat. He is not only revealed through his

words, which seem to be less important than his feelings and acts.

We learn how much he loves and suffers, mostly, through his reactions - he is humble while he is poor and becomes selfish and ill-tempered as his riches increase; in addition, he is constantly haunted by the desire for peace in his old age.

The matter of peace in *The Good Earth* seems to be related to the attachment of the main character to his earth, for he has never thought or wished for peace before having been uprooted from his land. This search for peace first appears when Wang Lung is idle, due to the flood that has lasted the whole summer. This way he goes to satisfy his restlessness and lust with Lotus at the tea shop. There is a subtle relation between peace and happiness that Wang Lung unconsciously grasps while he is working on his soil but which he loses when he becomes less and less careful with his land.

The Chinese have developed a philosophy of their own:

*There comes a time in our lives when the innocence of spring is a memory and the exuberance of summer a song whose echoes faintly remain in the air, when we look out on life, the problem is not how to grow but how to live truly, not how to strive and labor but how to enjoy the precious moments we have, not how to*

*squander our energy but how to conserve it in preparation for the coming winter. A sense of having arrived somewhere, of having settled and having found out what we want. A sense of having achieved something also, precious little compared with its past exuberance, but still something, like an autumn forest shorn of its summer glory but retaining such of it as will endure.<sup>26</sup>*

Wang Lung has come to his mature age like China has come to her maturity. At this point a man wishes to enjoy life and to appreciate what beauties life has to offer. However, he is not thoroughly happy nor at peace, for it seems that every time he settles a problem, another one turns up. Wang Lung seems to be doomed not to deserve peace because he has turned away from his land. He in fact experiences annoyances that disturb him one after the other. In order to have peace Wang Lung is even quite ready to spend some money; he is reluctant to display his silvers to buy some opium to calm down his "uninvited" guests—his uncle, his uncle's wife, and his idle cousin; however, after some persuasive reflexions of Wang's eldest son that to have them around, intruding in any matters in the courts and spending money on delicacies and expensive food, would cost more than to have them addicted to opium, Wang Lung yields — the old couple becomes addicted to opium until they die.

Little by little Wang Lung becomes bored of the domestic troubles and wants to get rid of them as soon as possible, for he feels he is now at the age that he

can enjoy life and have peace at last. The first time he perceives he is growing old is when he goes to the great house to see whether it is worth living in it. There he sees an old woman that once had opened the gate for him on his wedding day and later when he came with his eldest son

*He went back through the courts, although it was for idle curiosity and not because he had decided anything, but still he went on and at the back he found a gate locked into a court and beside it the pock-marked wife of the man who had been gateman. This astonished him and he looked at her whom he had remembered as buxom and middle-aged, now haggard and wrinkled and white haired, and her teeth were yellow snags loose in her jaws, and looking at her thus he saw in a full moment how many years and how swift were the years that had passed since he was a young man coming with his first-born son in his arms, and for the first time in his life Wang Lung felt his age creeping upon him.<sup>27</sup>*

As he grows older his impatience seems to accompany his age and also there increases a sense of deserving time for himself, of enjoying life, and having peace. He does not endure trifling quarrels as the ones there are between his daughters-in-law, consequently, when the two wives hated each other, this hatred spread to men also and in the courts of the two were full of anger and Wang Lung groaned because there was no peace in his house.<sup>28</sup>

His desire for peace seems to become more acute after he has rented his land, although he still keeps going back on it every day to feel and to smell the land

of his own. There he feels happy and peaceful due to the close contact with it. As he grows older he does not go there every day; as a matter of fact he seldom goes there. Eventually that feeling of being at peace has never been strongly felt. Although Wang Lung is aware that he has done more than he wished and has accomplished and achieved more than he has dreamed of possessing, never has he had peace again.

*Then Wang Lung came down off the days and it seemed to him that now his life was rounded off and he had done all that he said he would in his life and more than he would ever have dreamed he could, and he did not know himself how it had all come about. Only it seemed to him that peace could truly come to him and he could sleep in the sun. It was time for it, also, for he was close to sixty-five years of his age and his grandsons were like bamboos around him, three the sons of the eldest son, and the eldest of these nearly ten years old, and two the sons of his second son. Well, there was the third son to wed one day soon, and with that over there was nothing left to trouble him in his life, and he could be at peace.  
But there was no peace.<sup>29</sup>*

Peace seems to mean the utmost state of mind a man is to obtain after having struggled all his life and having achieved and fulfilled his dreams, like having set a family, offsprings to carry his name on, sons to continue his work, and, finally, time for one to appreciate the beauty of Nature and enjoy the remaining of life in him. Wang Lung has not had all that luck- the end of the book is rather sarcastic, for he overhears that his sons intend to sell the land when he dies; even the reassurance of his sons



that the land would not be sold is not enough to ease him. Wang Lung has accomplished a great deal but does not have peace.

*And his two sons held him, one on either end, each holding his arm, and he held tight in his hand the warm loose earth. And they soothed him and they said over and over, the eldest son and the second son, "Rest assured, our father. The land is not to be sold." But over the old man's head they looked at each other and smiled.<sup>30</sup>*

Wang Lung feels comfort in the end of his days when he finally decides to come back to live in his earthen house away from the continuous quarrels in his town house and away from other domestic affairs. However, we may not say he is at peace, there seems that something is still missing.

As for Wang Lung's characterization we may say that

*His character takes on seriousness; he receives dimension and a satisfying solidity, and becomes vivid to the reader.*

.....  
*Part of the reason for this vividness rests in the universality of the novel's various portraits... [The events] convey, as one critic remarks, the "continuity of human experience" and render "into universal terms immemorial human attitudes". It is just this*

*similarity to truth and our own individual lives that makes The Good Earth stir deep patterns of recognition within the mind and heart of its readers. It portrays life as it is: all true, all believable.*<sup>31</sup>

Wang Lung is indeed the character that the author has developed best by accompanying him through his different phases along his life. He is not a typified character-one that we could sum up in a couple of words, neither can we define him as a hero because of his goodness and ambitions, nor a villain due to his greed and ill-temper-ness. Although the setting of the novel is Chinese and the characters are also Chinese, Wang Lung does not escape from having universal reactions to birth, death, marriage, annoyances, sufferings, and happiness. All this may be the reason why he is made credible, to the extent that he seems to be very close to the readers who experience similar feelings and reactions towards all these vital occurrences, although we cannot forget that a great number of attitudes towards these situations are different from the Westerners'.

At the first reading *The Good Earth* seems only to reveal China and most of the unknown and misinterpreted characteristics of this large country to the Westerners; however, this novel's characters acquire a dimension that they are made vivid and almost become human. O-lan in a way teaches us to accept life as it is, and to be content with what we have, and Wang Lung seems to be a reflex of

most successful men that struggle for peace in the end of their lives.

What, then, makes China different from the West? China is a country that has endured many tyrannies, rebellions, and wars throughout many centuries; even so, this country has learned not to get desperate. As Mr. Lin Yutang said China has come to her mature age—she lives in autumn now and has understood that *life is so precarious that when we know something truly satisfies us, we hold on to it tight, as a mother hugs her baby close to her breast in a dark, stormy night.*<sup>32</sup> China has had short periods of rest between wars and has learned that people have to get the most out of their lives and enjoy the pleasures and beauty of life while they live. There seems to be no need for thinking over any life after Death, since one has already lived intensely all the joyful and happy moments he has had in his lifetime. The Chinese are really simple and have mastered the art of living by the simplest way—admiring the beauty and harmony in Nature, and trying to bring them to his own way of living.

*Like a dreamer awakened, we see life, not with the romantic coloring of yesternight's dream but with a saner vision. We are more ready to give up the dubious, the glamorous and the unattainable, but at the same time to hold on to the few things that we know will give us happiness. We always go back to nature as an eternal source of beauty and of true and deep and lasting happiness. Deprived of progress and of national power, we yet throw open our windows and listen to cicadas or to the falling autumn leaves and*

*inhale the fragrance of chrysanthemums, and  
over the top there shines the autumn moon,  
and we are content.  
For we are now in the autumn of our national  
life.*<sup>33</sup>

In the end we may apprehend that nothing is more worthwhile than attaining happiness, which seems to be the aim of anybody's life. To be happy does not require much, for being happy to a Chinese means, most of all, to accept both the material and the spiritual goods of life he may have, even if these goods are few, this man can make a living out of them. The opposite of possessing goods - misfortune, is also accepted, for a Chinese has learned not to expect too much. He indeed has mastered certain virtues like endurance, industry, and pacificism, which seem to keep a Chinese always in high and good humour, and which also have made him be fond of a leisurely-life.

*All through it all pervades the spirit of  
man happy with himself and the universe, poor  
in possessions but rich in taste, experienced  
and full of worldly wisdom and yet simple-  
hearted, a bottle of emotions and yet  
apparently indifferent to all the outside  
world, cynically contented and wisely idle,  
loving simplicity and good material living.*<sup>34</sup>

Wang Lung seems to have reached this happiness in his old age, for he is quite apart from the outside events, he minds his own leisure time, and admires Nature. However this turns out to be not true, for he has not reached peace, maybe because he has abandoned his land, as he becomes wealthy.

Yet, there still remain moments of happiness to Wang Lung, like when he returns to his old house and is once again in very close contact with his soil - there indeed he feels a certain kind of peace.

In *The Good Earth* Miss Buck seems to have interpreted the Chinese correctly, for she has conveyed most of the Chinese characteristics in a very matter-of-fact way. In fact she has done more; she has made human the exotic and mythical figure of the Impenetrable Oriental, that, now through her writing, emerges as Universal, for Wang Lung demonstrates to have the same necessities, delights and sorrows as most people. He is no longer just an individual, to represent what man is really like.<sup>35</sup> Thus, that faraway figure of the Oriental is placed close to the Westerns because he can feel the same emotions, and undergoes sufferings and pains like the Occidentals. Besides, *The Good Earth* seems to have summoned the Westerns to try to be happy under whatever vicissitudes of fortune and to admire and understand what Nature has to show us, for the answers are so close to us that we do not need to find them too far. It is a cyclical and rounded-off life of the characters - they live, suffer, have children, fulfill, and die; they ascend in life while another family falls, due to the formers' industry and the latters' carelessness. But behind all these vital occurrences there lies the family and the

Chinese attachment to their land, which are skillfully presented in the character of Wang Lung.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>BUCK, p.18.

<sup>2</sup>LIN YUTANG, p.141.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.148-9.

Women,..., are not oppressed by their husbands or by their father-in-law, nor can sister-in-law oppress one another, since they are of equal rank. The only remaining possibility is that daughters-in-law may be oppressed by the mother-in-law and this is often what actually happens. The life of the daughter-in-law in a big Chinese family with its manifold responsibilities is often a very hard one. For a woman to please a man is a noble effort, but for her to please another woman is heroic, and many of them fail. The son, torn between loyalty to parents and love for his wife, never quite dares to stand up for her. Practically all tales of cruelty to women could be traced to an oppressor of the same sex. But then the daughter-in-law bides her time to be mother-in-law in turn. If she does arrive at that much-desired old age, it is truly a position of honor and power, well-earned by a life of service.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.146.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.151.

<sup>6</sup>BUCK, p.30.

<sup>7</sup>LIN YUTANG, p.53.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.44.

<sup>9</sup>BUCK, p.71.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.171.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.174.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.175.

<sup>13</sup>DOYLE , p.43-4.

<sup>14</sup>BUCK , p.20.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.24.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.49.

Wang Lung went in to look at his second son. O-lan had lain herself upon the bed after the cooking of the meal and the child lay beside her - a fat, placid child, well enough, but not so large as the first one. Wang Lung looked at him and then went back to the middle room well content. Another son, and another each year - one could not trouble with red eggs every year; it was enough to do it for the first. Sons every year; the house was full of good fortune - this woman brought him nothing but good fortune.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.157.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.184.

<sup>20</sup>LIN YUTANG , p.164.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.163.

<sup>22</sup>BUCK , p.215.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.67.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.181.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.143.

<sup>26</sup>LIN YUTANG , p.347.

<sup>27</sup>BUCK , p.251.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.287.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.285-6.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p.305.

<sup>31</sup>DOYLE, p.38.

<sup>32</sup>LIN YUTANG , p.346.



<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.347.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.324.

<sup>35</sup> THOMPSON , p.86.

Ela havia humanizado aquela figura mítica e sem face, o Oriental Inescrutável, que surgia agora de sua pena como Homem Universal. Wang Lung manifestava as mesmas necessidades, alegrias e tristezas, como gente de toda a parte; não era tanto um indivíduo, mas todo homem.

## 5. CONCLUSION

We have tried to show Miss Pearl Buck's concern about universal themes under the Chinese focus. She has manipulated them skillfully and, we might say, she has portrayed a world that seemed to be very different from the Western's. Miss Buck's choice of the Chinese, unknown to most of the Westerns, does not only seem to reveal China and her people, for her greatest concern is about the human being in general. She has dealt with universal themes - esteem, love, birth and death, integration to Nature, happiness, and peace; however, she has lent them from a country's point of view, the attitudes of which differ a great deal from those taken by the Occidentals. It was important to point out that she has not made any attempts to stress differences in both civilizations. As a matter of fact, she has presented the Chinese in such a way that no one would think of them as exotic and faraway from those who live across the Pacific Ocean.

The great difference may be in the Chinese's physical looking; however, we learn that innerly they

undergo experiences common to all human beings. Miss Buck has been very clear in this matter because in *The Good Earth* life is presented in a cyclical process, having the poor the opportunity of ascension while the rich may decay either financially or pshychologically, or even both. This is what happens in real life - one goes up while the other falls. Man just has to take his chance and make the best to improve and hold his opportunity tightly; nevertheless, even if one is at the top he may have his struggles and disappointments together with joyful and delightful moments.

We also introduced the Chinese background with the help of a valuable work written by a Chinese writer, Mr. Lin Yutang *My Country and My People* in order to learn some hidden aspects to help understand this large country and her people. With the aid of such work we had means to apprehend how much understanding Miss Pearl Buck has had and, finally, we could learn that she has done a remarkable work, not only for having portrayed the Chinese thought so well, but also for having excelled in understanding the human race with all wonders and miseries that make up such a complex being-man. It was explained that, although most of the preoccupations are the same as the Westerns', the attitudes of both before them differ a great deal.

It was possible to establish this through Mr. Lin

Yutang's explanations about the Chinese society and the principles that rule this civilization. A Chinese behaves differently from a Western not only because of the geographical and political distance but, basically, because of their concept of the cosmos and of their way of living. Society is not so important, as an organized establishment, as the family is. A Chinese always has in his mind his family's stability and steadiness. From the family thus derives his concept of a larger organization - the village and, consequently, the notion of China as a country grasped as the sum of different families and villages and cities. Within this small community - the family, we learn that the main principle that rules the Chinese character is the *filial piety* which consists of duties, respect, and admiration to the older. This esteem is also carried to the larger community - the village. At this point we learned what *face* means to a Chinese, a psychological face very peculiar to the Chinese, and which is to be acquired and then shown to the public.

After having set the characters in their social background, our second step was to establish the relationship of the characters to their land. Miss Buck's main characters in *The Good Earth* are doubtless Chinese due to their social and multiseccular background; nevertheless, they come out of it at a certain point to become universal. It is the family and every principle that is implicit in that

concept that rule the Chinese civilization and their cosmos; however, it is also true that ~~it is also true that~~ the close contact with Nature - with their land - that both characters have survived and grown. They should never forget where they came from because they will return to it when their lifetime is through. The care for their soil provides them food to keep on living and spiritual source to relieve their pains; in turn, Earth will retribute in form of happiness and peace in addition to self-realization.

Miss Buck's sensitiveness has grasped the great importance of the land to a Chinese, to the extent that she has named her most famous novel *The Good Earth* and taken the simple man of the country - a plougher, to be the novel's main character. Nobody seems to be better fit to embody the rural ideal in life than a plougher, for he knows, unconsciously, that to be happy is to be in close contact with Nature and that life is a cyclical process of birth and death. A Chinese does not fear death, for he is aware that death is man's natural end. Besides, he also knows that he may remain somewhat alive through his offsprings. This way, he may be immortalized through the Chinese custom of worshipping their dead, paying them respect even after their lifetime. Death thus does not frighten the Chinese because they are more concerned about enjoying life while they are alive than life hereafter.

Our next step was to limit ourselves to the main characters and we apprehended that although their customs

and their way of living are different from the Westerners" they experienced most of the pleasures and delights and preoccupations of the Occidentals. The novel's main character seemed to have pursued peace as he became wealthier. He seemed to start to fall when he unrooted from his land as if he were doomed to never have peace in him, due to his carelessness. It is important to stress that for a Chinese to be happy is in close relation to being at peace with himself. Since a man is happy when he is in close contact with his land, our main character became unhappy as he departed from his soil. It was not the physical departure that counted but his mind and care for his land that had been diverted. In the end of the book there seemed to be a kind of redemption for the main character's return to his land. In the end, what linked the previous poor farmer to the present wealthy landowner was his land which seemed to be always waiting for him.

Miss Buck seemed to have accomplished her aim because in the end we feel that man may be placed in any part of the world; nevertheless, he cannot help experiencing and undergoing delights and struggles that are common to all human beings. Time and space thus may change, even attitudes and values may change; however, man in his essence may not. He may be humble when this is convenient and be careless when he feels he is superior but his ambitions,

fears, and passions have been proved to be the same. *The Good Earth*, a simple and suitable title seems to remind us that we do not need to change the world, we only need to understand and contemplate living harmoniously with Nature to have the best of her: it is not the world that needs changes but man.

Miss Pearl S. Buck has dealt with concepts which are universal under the Chinese point of view and which she apprehended very well. *The Good Earth* is in fact set in the Chinese social and psychological context. Although it is understood that apart from the differences that exist between the Occident and China, the novel's main character - Wang Lung - may be set anywhere, for he is above all a man. Nevertheless, we ought to have clear in our minds that he is a Chinese due to his attitudes and concept of the world which Miss Buck has skillfully portrayed in *The Good Earth*.

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